CHAPTER 2.0

SIGNIFICANT ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS OF THE PROPOSED PROJECT

SUBCHAPTER 2.1

AESTHETICS

CHAPTER 2.0 – SIGNIFICANT ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS OF THE PROPOSED PROJECT

Chapter 2.0 discusses resource and service issues that have been determined to be significant during the EIR process, based on the level of potential impacts and/or the inclusion of associated project design elements. Specifically, Chapter 2.0 addresses the issues of aesthetics, biological resources, cultural resources, traffic/transportation, noise and paleontological resources.

Each of the subchapters below addresses:

- Existing conditions (including regulatory setting if compliance with approved plans will comprise an element of impacts analysis)
- Guidelines for the determination of significance (and the sources thereof)
- Potential effects of Project implementation against existing and anticipated future conditions (including the potential cumulative effect of other likely projects)
- Potential mitigation measures
- Conclusions as to whether or not mitigation measure implementation would lower identified significant impacts to less than significant levels

In order to assist the reader in tracking between impact significance conclusions and related mitigation measures, significance assessments and the associated mitigation measures have been given correlating numbers and letters. For example, for the issue of aesthetics, a significant impact is identified in the analysis as Impact AE-1 (Aesthetics impact number 1). The measure designed to attenuate that impact is identified as M-AE-1 (i.e., Mitigation for Aesthetics impact number 1) in the subsequent mitigation discussion.

2.1 Aesthetics

The following discussion is based on the Visual Impact Analysis for the Proposed Project prepared by HELIX Environmental Planning, Inc. (HELIX 2009). The complete report is included as Appendix C of this EIR.

2.1.1 Existing Conditions

2.1.1.1 *Existing Setting*

Existing Conditions and Visibility

This existing conditions discussion addresses the surrounding area, as well as the Sugarbush property and Cleveland Trail to the west (the latter road would provide secondary emergency access for the Project). Figure 2.1-1, Project Viewshed/Photograph Locations, identifies the location and view orientation of each photograph used in this analysis. The reader is referred to discussion below for additional information on viewshed creation/methodology.

Surrounding Area

The general topographic and developing nature of this portion of the County is described in Chapter 1.0 of this EIR (Section 1.4.1, Project Vicinity Characteristics and depicted on Figure 1-6, Project Location Relative to Surrounding Uses). With regard to community and localized neighborhood character, the area contains a mixed use of residential subdivisions, high-end individually designed homes, rural residential

homes and agricultural activities. Specifically with regard to surrounding residential uses, the 23 lots in the adjacent existing Sugarbush Drive neighborhood immediately north of the Project range from one to two acres overall (with one lot exceeding two acres [2.33 acres]) and average 1.34 acres. The Lone Oak neighborhood directly west of the Project is an older developed neighborhood with variable lot sizes. Zoned for minimum 0.5-acre lots, there are 36 lots in the neighborhood, ranging in size from 0.5 acre to 4.84 acres. The 21 lots in the Highview Trail neighborhood adjacent to the southwest corner of the Project site range in size from 0.53 to 2.47 acres, with an average size of 0.87 acre (only one of the 21 lots is over two acres [2.47 acres]). In addition, immediately southwest of the Lone Oak Lane/Lone Oak Road and Highview Trail neighborhoods (1,400 feet southwest of the Project site) is an area zoned for Mobile Home Residential Use. This area contains approximately 130 units on 31 acres, with an allowed density of 4.3 dwelling units/acre.

Sugarbush Parcel

On-site visual elements include dirt roads and trails, knolls, steep sloping hillsides, remnant orchard, some disturbance due to prior beekeeping activities and native vegetation. The bulk of the Project site supports native vegetation. Avocados were grown on the northeast portion of the site, and olive production may have occurred on southern portions of the site (individual trees are still present).

Panoramic views to the north, west and south are available from western portions of the site and to the west from the northeastern portion of the site. Views easterly are blocked by the above-described major hill for most of the site and by a smaller hill and developed land uses to the east and north from the eastern portion of the site. Photographs to and from the site are provided for reference in this discussion and are described below.

The first seven photographs were taken off site, toward the Project site. The second set of photographs was taken on site. They are oriented toward off-site locations and also illustrate existing conditions on the property.

Figure 2.1-2A illustrates two viewpoints northeasterly of the Proposed Project. From the Photograph 1 location, the Sugarbush site is obscured by intervening landforms. Photograph 2 illustrates views of the Sugarbush site from Fredas Hill, also northeast of the Project site. The photograph shows the relatively flat portion of the site that would form the majority of the Sugarbush development. Homes westerly of the Sugarbush property can be seen, as well as several existing homes aligned along Sugarbush Drive.

Figure 2.1-2B, Photograph 3 looks to the extreme northeastern extent of the Sugarbush property from a residential lot (under construction at the time of the photograph) immediately abutting the site to the north. Topographic variation in the area is illustrated, as is part of the remnant agricultural use on the property (terraced along the steep-sloped landform that provides the southern boundary to the northeastern portion of the proposed project).

Figure 2.1-2B, Photograph 4 was taken from Holly Lane, the roadway that accesses a few residences across the major canyon to the south of Sugarbush. A portion of an existing house that abuts the Sugarbush southwestern property boundary is seen, as is the broad knoll that the southern-most site development would occur upon. In the far mid-distance, the northerly knoll (also proposed for development) can be seen. Background views include existing residential development in the area as well as the far distant San Marcos and Merriam mountains.

Figure 2.1-2C depicts views from westerly of the Proposed Project. Photograph 5 illustrates the existing view from Vista Royal Drive. Intervening development (similar to that proposed) is shown, as are the homes that abut the property to the west. Most of the relatively flat portions of the Sugarbush property

are shown, as well as the substantial hills backing the proposed development. Photograph 6 was taken from a private drive approximately 0.5 mile west of the Project's western boundary. It is representative of the panoramic views from the residential neighborhood located on the north-south trending landform west of the project. Views of the Sugarbush property include the flatter portions of the site as well as the steep slopes that define the eastern limits of the Project.

Figure 2.1-2D, Photograph 7 was taken from Lone Oak Lane just west of the property, looking eastward toward the Project and future end of Street "E." It represents the view a limited number of neighbors would have toward the site.

Figure 2.1-3A depicts views from the southern portion of the property. Photograph 8 was taken from the southern property boundary, looking north along the canyon ridge. Remnant olive trees, as well as sage scrub vegetation are visible, as is one of the dirt roads that bisects the property. A previously graded pad is evident on the slope to the east, as is surrounding residential development to the north and east, as well as the far distant San Marcos and Merriam mountains. Photograph 9 was taken from the southwestern portion of the Sugarbush property. It illustrates the immediacy and scale of the hills to the east and south of the western portion of the site, and additional existing dirt roads and sage scrub habitat.

Figure 2.1-3B, Photograph 10 was taken from the central portion of the site looking southerly. It illustrates existing topographic variation within the eastern extent of the developable "saddle" portion of the site. Sage scrub habitat is shown, as is one of the dirt roads on site and distant remnant olive trees located near the southern Project boundary. A portion of the steep slopes east of the site comprises the background.

Figure 2.1-3C contains photographs taken from the north-central portion of the site. Photograph 11 looks westerly, and shows on-site disturbance related to prior beehives, as well as scrub vegetation. Homes to the west of the property line are shown, as are more distant residential uses, the mix of orchard and oak trees immediately west of the property line, and the beginning of the northern slope that leads to the broad knoll at the property's northwest corner. Photograph 12 was taken from the same locale, looking northerly. The small drainage that bisects the north portion of the property in an east-west direction is evident, and the northernmost knoll that would be within a dedicated open space lot provides the focus of the photograph. One of the existing (abutting) properties along Sugarbush Drive is clearly seen to the northeast of the Project.

Overall, the Project area is assessed as having moderate existing visual quality. The photographs illustrate little visual unity (i.e., visual coherence) within the Project area. A variety of topographic features, lot sizes, home sizes and styles, and landscaping, as well as areas of native vegetation, are evident. On the other hand, at least with regard to the developed environment, there is a certain level of intactness—individually built single-family residences are located on fairly large lots with largely mature vegetation, and are sited throughout the area within the valleys and on the slopes and peaks of all but the highest topographic features. Interspersed among these larger lot residences are smaller lots/more intensively developed parcels. Within the Project site, intactness is minimal. Variety is provided by the large-scale vegetated hill, defunct agricultural terracing with remnant tree stands, past bee-keeping, current chicken coops, dirt roads, native scrub and disturbed vegetation.

Notable visible landforms include the relatively distant San Marcos and Merriam mountains, as well as the unnamed steep slopes located just east of the proposed Sugarbush development. These undeveloped areas are visually dominant only on their upper slopes or in the far distance. Closer and lower views demonstrate the diversity associated with a combination of residential uses, remnant agricultural or commercial (nursery) operations and intermixed areas of natural landscape.

Cleveland Trail

Photographs of Cleveland Trail depict conditions beginning at the intersection with Buena Creek Road and then move easterly to the Project property line.

The intersection of Cleveland Trail and Buena Creek Road is visible to motorists on Buena Creek Road for approximately 850 feet in either direction. The intersection can also be seen from some residential lots accessed off of Buena Creek Trail, directly across Buena Creek Road from the Cleveland Trail intersection. The residential lots off Buena Creek Trail contain ornamental landscaping and mature trees that comprise the foreground views from these properties.

The paved portion of Cleveland Trail currently ends at the Project site, although some dirt roads continue onto the Sugarbush property. Two residences with several out-buildings are located on the south side of Cleveland Trail. Both of these locales have the main structures aligned north/south, with primary views to the east and west rather than to Cleveland Trail. The property that abuts the Sugarbush western property line immediately south of Cleveland Trail has vehicles, agricultural storage items, and a minimal amount of vegetation located between Cleveland Trail and the main structure.

Figures 2.1-4A and 2.1-4B depict the Cleveland Trail intersection with Buena Creek Road. The road intersects at an angle, and currently is not marked by road signs. A couple of mail boxes are the only delineating features (see Figure 2.1-4A, Photographs 13 and 14). Oak trees and other tall, dense vegetation and a patch of prickly pear cactus are growing near the intersection. Figure 2.1-4B, Photographs 15 and 16 illustrate the existing intersection of Cleveland Trail and Buena Creek Road from Cleveland Trail. Surrounding land uses to the northeast and southwest are depicted, as is the curving nature of Buena Creek Road.

Figure 2.1-5A, Photograph 17 shows vegetation along the western portion of Cleveland Trail, where the road is screened from abutting uses by dense vegetation, consisting mostly of oak trees. Photograph 18 depicts the eastward curve in Cleveland Trail approximately 150 feet from the intersection. Because Buena Creek Road is lined with dense vegetation, the rest of Cleveland Trail is not visible from Buena Creek Road.

Figure 2.1-5B, Photograph 19 illustrates the more open nature south of Cleveland Trail where residential uses do not abut the road, and contrasts it with the northern side of the road, where vegetation is more dense. Photograph 20 illustrates the narrow nature of portions of existing Cleveland Trail, as well as proximity of an abutting home and associated ornamental vegetation.

Figure 2.1-6 (Photographs 21 and 22) illustrates the northern side of Cleveland Trail just west of its existing terminus at the Sugarbush property line. A Project-proposed fire wall would be located in this area in order to minimize exposure to wildfire for off-site lots to the south of this proposed feature as well as to minimize removal of sensitive vegetation that otherwise would be required along Cleveland Trail by the Fire Marshal.

Figure 2.1-7 (Photographs 23 and 24) chicken coops constructed on the Project property by an adjacent property resident and illustrates the proximity of these uses to the Sugarbush property line.

Overall, the visual setting of Cleveland Trail is varied—ranging from a cloistered feel resulting from restricted areas of overhanging canopy to more open areas where the road is abutted by fields and more distant views to surrounding hills. Along the approximately 1,200-foot length of the road, natural, agricultural (including fencing) and residential elements (including rural dumpsters/discarded equipment) are all experienced. The number and variety of competing visual elements combined with a generally rural atmosphere results in existing visual quality being rated as moderate.

Criteria for Determining Project Viewshed/Types of Viewers

A "viewshed" is an analytical tool. It aids in identification of views that could be affected by a proposed project, and encompasses areas observable from a specific locale and/or from which views to the locale can be seen. For the Sugarbush property, views to the Project within an approximately one-mile radius are considered close enough to allow viewers to visually "read" project elements such as landform modification, and the spatial mass and form of proposed structures. Beyond that distance, topographic modifications and residential structures become visually muted and distinguishable only as facets of the larger regional landscape.

This is a conservative depiction of potential sight-lines, because it was based on the following conservative criteria:

- The theoretical viewshed has been computer generated and is based solely on topographic data
- The viewshed does not take into account intervening structures, boulders, landscaping or residential orientation

Figure 2.1-1 illustrates the overall extent of area within approximately one mile from which views to the Project site would be possible, and highlights the location of viewers who, based on mapped topography alone, would have views to proposed developable portions of the property.

Viewer response to view changes is composed of two elements: viewer sensitivity and viewer exposure. *Viewer sensitivity* is defined both as the viewers' concern for scenic quality and the viewers' response to change in the visual resources that make up the view. Local values and goals may confer visual significance on landscape components and areas that would otherwise appear unexceptional in a visual resource analysis. *Viewer exposure* is typically assessed by measuring the number of viewers exposed to the resource change, type of viewer activity, duration of the view, the speed at which the viewer moves, and position of the viewer.

Public views onto the Project site would be possible from surrounding local public roadways to the north, northwest and northeast. The local roads provide motorists and pedestrians with views ranging from restricted to expansive aspects into the site. No parks or other formal public viewpoints are located in proximity to the Proposed Project. No State or County scenic highways or priority scenic routes have views to the Project site.

In general, roadways within the Project vicinity consist of two-lane rural collectors utilized by local residents within the existing low-density residential community. East-west through traffic is generally routed southerly to SR 78 or S14 (South Santa Fe Avenue/West Mission Road) in this area, and the primary north-south connectors are located east and west of the property area (Twin Oaks Valley Road/I-15 and Vista Way, respectively). The number of viewers traveling on the surrounding local roadways is, therefore, relatively low and primarily limited to existing residents and their visitors. Buena Creek Road has a current 24-hour volume of approximately 10,300 average daily trips (ADT) between Sugarbush Drive and South Santa Fe Avenue, and approximately 8,400 ADT between Sugarbush Drive and North Twin Oaks Valley Road. Roads such as Holly Lane (on the ridgeline to the south of the site) support only drivers accessing the number of homes located along them.

Although drivers passing by an area may note changes in the vicinity, their primary focus is on speed of travel and interaction with other drivers. This focus, combined with both the relatively short duration of exposure time and the number of competing visual elements due to the expansive viewshed (including the winding nature of many area roads), is expected to lessen the importance of specific view elements for

this group of viewers. Vehicular passengers would be less concerned about traffic conditions and therefore generally could be more focused on the passing viewscape. Although lessened in level of effect, however, any distraction at all, when combined with the relatively short duration for visibility, would result in the visual impact of specific view elements being less important for this group of viewers than for more static groups such as residential viewers, discussed below.

Private views to the developed footprint (highlighted in yellow on Figure 2.1-1) are limited to approximately 421 residences within a one mile radius, and the private roads that access them. Averaged over the potential one-mile viewshed radius, one residence in each five acres potentially would have a view to part of the Project developed area.

Many residents in this area have elevated views of at least a portion of the Project site. These are long-term, stationary views. As shown on Figures 2.1-2A through D and previously described, area homes are sited throughout the hills, with a substantial amount of local topographic variation (small hills, bumps and gullies located on the larger hill forms). Residential landscaping or privacy walls also provide frequent shielding of view elements. In other cases, residential (or related) structures themselves block views. This is particularly true for some homes close to the Proposed Project but located westerly of the homes immediately abutting the western Sugarbush property line, where existing canopy of adjacent landscaping or structures may intervene between the viewer and the site. Absent distance, the viewer is unable to see "over" lower intervening uses. Regardless, where views exist, they can be expansive. In these instances, open views encompassing adjacent developed uses, and the hills/ridgelines are visible. For these viewers, the Project area can provide an often-seen and intimately known view. These residential viewers would be expected to be sensitive to changes in the immediate viewscape.

As mentioned above, other homes/viewers within the larger viewshed would only view the undeveloped open space areas of the Project. This includes the steep-sided hillsides and the highest elevations of the project.

2.1.1.2 *Regulatory Framework*

With regard to aesthetics, policies related to lot size and placement, as well as permitted uses, generally are the most critical elements related to the seen character of a location. Policies relevant to aesthetics/visual resources and the Proposed Project are presented in a number of planning documents, as discussed below.

<u>San Diego County General Plan</u>

One of the elements within the County General Plan is the Scenic Highway Element. The purpose of this element is to establish a Scenic Highway Program to protect and enhance the County's scenic, historic and recreational resources within a network of scenic highway corridors. The Project site is not in proximity to a scenic roadway/highway, and the proposed development area cannot be seen from any such road. Therefore, this element is not further discussed.

<u>North County Metropolitan Subregional Plan</u>

The NCM Subregional Plan does not specifically permit a minimum one-half acre lot size for the Project site. One goal is noted as particularly relevant to the Sugarbush residential development: "Protect environmental resources" (p. 3). Focused specifically on "scenic rugged terrain which is not suitable for urbanization" this goal notes that resource conservation areas have been identified to help protect resources (biological, archaeological, aesthetic, mineral and water) throughout the subregion. Although focused on existing conservation areas, this goal is also relevant to any area with rugged topography and

one or more of the cited resources. The NCM Subregional Plan also addresses scenic highways. As stated above under "San Diego County General Plan," however, no scenic roadways/highways are near the Project site and the proposed development area cannot be seen for any such road. Therefore, scenic highway goals and policies are not applicable to the Proposed Project, and are not further discussed.

Resource Protection Ordinance

The County RPO focuses on the preservation and protection of the County's unique topography, natural beauty, diversity, natural resources and quality of life. It is intended to protect the integrity of sensitive lands (e.g., including wetlands, floodplains/floodways, sensitive habitats and steep slopes), all of which can comprise important components of visual quality and community character.

Because the RPO has strict standards for preservation of steep slopes, it is the County's primary planning tool in the preservation of these features. The RPO defines steep slopes as all lands having a natural gradient of 25 percent or greater and a minimum rise of 50 vertical feet, unless said land has been substantially disturbed by previous legal grading. The RPO includes the following elements with regard to steep slopes:

- Provision of a density formula for limiting the number of lots and/or dwelling units in specific slope categories
- Provision of a steep slope encroachment allowance for development, based on the percentage of the lot in steep slopes
- Requirement of the dedication of an open space easement over all steep slopes, except for the allowable encroachment area (and other specific exemptions)

There is substantial topographic variation on the Sugarbush project site, and a substantial amount of on-site acreage (36.6 percent of the site) contains slopes steeper than 25 percent gradient (see Appendix C of Appendix C to this EIR).

2.1.2 Analysis of Project Effects and Determination as to Significance

2.1.2.1 *Substantial Effect on a Valued Focal and/or Panoramic Vista from a Public Viewpoint*

Guideline for the Determination of Significance

A significant impact to aesthetics would occur if a proposed project would:

1. Substantially obstruct, interrupt, or detract from a valued focal and/or panoramic vista from a public road, a trail within an adopted County or State trail system, a scenic vista or highway, or a recreational area.

Guideline No. 1 is based on the County's Guidelines for Determining Significance and Report Format and Content Requirements – Visual Resources (July 30, 2007).

Analysis

This guideline addresses potential Project effects on identified public viewpoints. As noted in Section 2.1.1, no parks or other formal public viewpoints are located in proximity to the Proposed Project. Similarly, no scenic highways or roadways have views to the Project. **No impact** would occur to these resources, and they are not additionally discussed below.

With regard to substantial detraction from a valued vista from a public road, the Project site is most closely bordered by private, rather than public, roads. The reader is referred to Section 2.1.2.2 of this subchapter for discussion of potential impacts from private viewpoints.

Where views are available from public roads, they typically are along narrow corridors, generally at distance, and fleeting in nature. This results from: (1) existing vegetation located along area roadways that frequently confines the travelers' view to the immediate vicinity of the roadway; (2) the curving nature of many of the local roads, which results in a frequent shifting of the viewers' focus; and (3) the diversity of landform in this part of the County, so that small knolls and larger hills frequently block long-range views. As a traveler moves along these roads, changes in roadway direction obscure the Proposed Project site, and/or change the angle of view, which is also partially or wholly obscured by intervening development and vegetation. Viewers enjoying the changeable but expansive nature of easterly/southerly views from higher roads to the north and west would see the site only as a small portion of a much larger and shifting view. Any detraction from existing conditions would not be expected to be substantial given the short view time and changing conditions experienced by the moving viewer.

With regard to obstruction (i.e., blockage) or interruption of views, the same general logic applies. Project effects would be extremely limited. The Project site is generally located below the viewer's sight line, or at a distance sufficient to provide for other viewshed elements as a background (e.g., the presence of the distant San Marcos and Merriam mountains as the viewshed boundary for viewers from the south). The distance and elevation of views from surrounding public roadways, as well as their fleeting nature, would result in minimal obstruction or interruption of views from those facilities. In addition, the proposed location of the residential portion of the Project on the lower-lying part of the property, and planned retention of the higher elevations/steepest slopes on the Property in open space also eliminate the potential for substantial obstruction or interruption of views from these distant (and generally elevated) roadways. The viewer would be looking over the development to the higher slopes.

With that larger picture in mind, two public streets in particular are close to the Project. The closest public street is Sugarbush Drive, which currently dead ends just north of the Project boundary, but would be extended on site as part of the Project. Current views from this street to the Project property are generally obscured by existing residential uses and a slight topographic rise as well as an existing stand of eucalyptus. No impact to an existing view from this road is identified.

When the Project is developed, Sugarbush Drive would be extended onto the Project site. Any views provided further to the south by this extension (and opening up of the noted visual blockage) would provide additional view possibilities to the steep slope in the eastern portion of the Property, which is to be left in open space.

Buena Creek Road is the closest primary public road, as it loops around the Proposed Project site on the west, north and east sides. Views to the developable portions of the site are screened from this roadway by intervening topography and dense vegetation. This vegetation would not be removed based on Project implementation, and no impact based on views to the portion of the property planned for residential use is identified. Views to the intersection with Cleveland Trail would be available from Buena Creek Road. Cleveland Trail, a private road accessing several homes between Buena Creek Road and the Sugarbush western boundary, does not comprise a valued focal point. No impact is identified with regard to views toward Project residential elements from Buena Creek Road.

Related to provision of sight distance at the intersection of Buena Creek Road and Sugarbush Drive, Project improvements would occur on the south side of Buena Creek Road. All work would occur within existing road right-of-way and/or slope embankment easements currently held by the County, except on a

portion of Lot 21 of Hollyberry Estates to the east of this intersection. Improvements would include initial brush clearance, slope modification, hydroseeding with a native (sage scrub) habitat erosion control hydroseed, and construction of a retaining wall. Post implementation, the County would assume all responsibilities associated with continued trimming and maintenance.

To the west of Sugarbush Drive, a 553-foot line of sight from the Sugarbush/Buena Creek Road intersection would require approximately 350 feet of 2:1 cut slope ranging in height from zero to four feet in height. The 2:1 cut slope would be located in an area where the ground slopes up west to east. Existing sage scrub, some eucalyptus trees and two small oak trees are visible in the area. The two small oaks would be removed, but are isolated (i.e., do not visually comprise a "woodland"). Given the retention of the majority of the larger eucalyptus tree canopy in the vicinity, their loss would not change the visual experience of the traveler along this roadway. Similarly, the scrub in this area reads visually as soil, sparse grasses, and disturbed vegetation. The loss of a small amount of scrub vegetation where there is substantial existing disturbance would not comprise a significant visual effect (although see Subchapter 2.2 of this EIR for biological impacts). Following grading, the modified slope would be hydroseeded with a native sage scrub mix and be left to regenerate naturally. Following vegetation regeneration, the 2:1 slope would look natural and the sage scrub would blend into existing abutting vegetation. Long-term visual impacts would be less than significant.

East of Sugarbush Drive, slope modification would occur for approximately 165 feet in length with a maximum height of eight feet, and a retaining wall of earth-toned slump stone would be installed, ranging from zero to five feet in height. The proposed retaining wall would be located in an area of increasing slope steepness paralleling Buena Creek Road, and a maximum five-foot cut slope at 1.5:1 steepness would surmount the retaining wall. The wall would start in front of the east end of an existing chain link fence that currently separates private property and the County road right-of-way and extend easterly. It would be peripherally visible to drivers along Buena Creek Road. Grading in this area would result in the removal of coastal sage scrub and, potentially, several ornamental trees out of a larger grove. Following construction, the modified slope would be hydroseeded with a native sage scrub mix and left to regenerate naturally. While introducing a new element to this part of the road, the five-foot wall would be sited along a turn in the road (and adjacent to cross traffic), which would provide the view focus for travelers along Buena Creek Road. The retaining wall would hug the terrain and would be somewhat similar in style to the free-standing privacy walls located in the vicinity of Pleiades Drive, approximately half a mile west of Sugarbush Drive.

Given the retention of the vast majority of the ornamental tree grove, hydroseeding with a native seed mix and subsequent revegetation of modified slope area, the relatively short distance and low height of the retaining wall, and the similarity to like wall features in the general vicinity of the proposed retaining feature, visual impacts associated with improvement of line of sight are identified as less than significant.

Taking into account the lack of identified focal points, the general lack of visibility to Project elements from public roads, and the distance at which visible portions of the site could contribute to valued vistas where views <u>are</u> available from public roads, no *substantial* obstruction, interruption, or detraction from a valued focal and/or panoramic vista from a public road would occur and **no impact** is identified.

2.1.2.2 *Introduction of Features Detracting from or Contrasting with Existing Visual Character*

Guideline for the Determination of Significance

A significant impact to aesthetics would occur if a proposed project would:

2. Introduce features that would detract from or contrast with the existing visual character and/or quality of a neighborhood, community, or localized area by conflicting with important visual elements or the quality of the area or by being inconsistent with applicable design guidelines.

Guideline No. 2 is based on the County's Guidelines for Determining Significance and Report Format and Content Requirements – Visual Resources (July 30, 2007).

Analysis

This is a complex topic that requires review of the Proposed Project from a number of different viewpoints. The analysis addresses specific elements related to introduction of residential uses, as well as roadway installation/upgrades. Within the residential discussion in particular, potential change to character as seen by community-wide versus adjacent neighborhood viewers is addressed. Within these discussions, consistency in terms of overall Project planning (e.g., lot size) as well as design elements (e.g., slope creation) is analyzed.

The reader is also referred to other topical discussions for related information. No specific design guidelines from the NCM Subregional Plan or an approved Specific Plan are available for the Sugarbush site (design guidelines within the Subregional Plan focus on the I-15 Scenic Corridor only). Consistency overall with relevant elements of planning documents is addressed in Section 2.1.2.4 of this subchapter.

Currently, the site appears as open space, and, depending upon distance, can appear either natural or disturbed in nature. Topography appears natural. The immediate vicinity is depicted on Figure 1-6 and discussed in Section 2.1.1.1 of this EIR. A variety of lot sizes and home styles are accessed from Buena Creek Road. These are the visual elements currently contributing to existing neighborhood visual character or quality.

For viewers with potential sight-lines to the development bubble, several criteria are useful in determining the impact of Project effect.

- Breadth of the view (views taking in a number of elements rely less on any one element than those with greater focus)
- Depth of the view (increased distance from the observed element makes it appear smaller, less detail is registered, and visibility may be affected by atmospheric conditions such as fog, smog, etc.)
- Amount of time (and/or number of times) each observer is exposed to the view
- Number of viewers exposed to the view (a greater number of viewers makes the view more sensitive)

Community Viewers

Site Density

As discussed in Section 2.1.2.1 above, views to the Project area from the larger community would be fleeting, partially obscured and/or relatively distant. Nonetheless, the Project site constitutes an element in expansive views from areas at higher elevation and from roadways with lesser levels of landscaping/vegetation in the vicinity.

The question is whether the proposed half-acre lots would contrast with the overall community as perceived by these viewers. The issue is not simply one of change. For a significant impact to be identified, the change must conflict with important visual elements or quality of the area.

As shown in Figures 1-5 and 1-6 of this EIR, views within the larger community encompass a variety of land use types and densities, with differing amounts of "greenery" or open space. Inclusion of 45 landscaped residences on half-acre lots would not be expected to result in visible adverse contrast from existing development types within the expansive viewshed. (This is discussed in greater depth relative to neighborhood viewers below.) Given the short viewing time and/or distance at which community viewers would see the Project, the proposed development would have to be much larger or consist of a substantially different use (e.g., long linear greenhouses, or a quarry), for it to stand out as substantially different from and inconsistent with other community uses.

Design Elements

A considerable amount of grading (approximately 322,000 cubic yards) would be required to create level areas for residential development. Thirty-four of the 45 residential lots would have cut slopes. These slopes would range from 1 to 47 feet in height. A total of 29 residential lots would have fill slopes. These slopes would range from 3 to 42 feet in height. All cut and fill slopes associated with residential lots would be constructed at a gradient no greater than 2:1.

This amount of topographic change would constitute a substantial variation from existing conditions. While very different in terms of absolute change, the visual effect of this change would be relatively restricted due to lot siting, landscaping and restricted visibility, as discussed below.

As depicted on the viewshed map, roughly 421 residences would have views to all or a portion of the Project development. Comparing that number with the number of potential public viewers on area roads (10,300 on Buena Creek Road, 18,900 along Santa Fe Avenue, 18,200 along Deer Springs Road) illustrates the lower level of magnitude with regard to number of private viewers. The majority of static viewers would:

- Continue to see only open space portions of the site (which would result in no change from existing conditions),
- See only a portion of the proposed slopes due to other intervening uses, and/or
- See both development and the large open space slopes associated with the hill on the eastern property edge.

Two cross-sections were prepared to illustrate proposed modifications to existing landform/grades (see Figure 2.1-8 for cross-section orientation). Section A-a illustrates existing and proposed conditions across the midpoint of the western portion of the property in an east-west direction, crossing proposed lots 2, 18, 26 and 40 (Figure 2.1-9A). Section B-b bisects proposed lots 21 through 12 in descending order, as well as Lot 10, illustrating the entirety of proposed development from the northern to southern boundary

of the site on the west half of the property (Figure 2.1-9B). Combined, these cross sections illustrate the difference between existing and Project conditions in the amount of fill required for pad creation looking at the site west-to-east, and the relationship of the overall grading pattern to underlying natural conditions north-to-south.

As shown on Figure 1-4 in Chapter 1.0, the proposed lots would form four roughly parallel north-south lines in the western portion of the site. The proposed clustering of the residential development would result in "stair-step" grading between individual lots as well as terraced grading between tiers of house pads. Viewers would see single-family residences on minimum one-half acre lots "terraced" into the larger landform (i.e., artificial level pads that follow the overall elevational variation of the underlying topography, but do not necessarily match the original elevation in any particular lot). Under existing conditions, the area slopes generally from 590 to 680 feet amsl in this area. Using Cross Section A as an example, it can be seen that although pad elevations are anticipated to range from 605 to 690 in this area following construction, there is only an approximately 0- to 10-foot difference in elevation between the first and second row (and the third and fourth row) of homes, although there is up to a 25-foot difference between the second and third row.

This amount of slope creation, which may seem inconsistent with immediate area development, is a direct result of the proposed clustering. Rather than each slope being visible, however, the cut associated with any lots internal to the Project (i.e., not along the western, northern or southern perimeters) would be shielded from view by the homes and landscaping placed upon perimeter and/or adjacent lots. Once residential structures are built, the primary views remaining to on-site slopes would be associated with the western site boundary, additionally discussed under Neighborhood Viewers, below.

The Project landscaping would be installed as soon as grading is completed and utilities (i.e., water) are available. This early installation would occur in order to screen exposed Project slopes regardless of whether or not the slopes would be interior to the site. The planting scheme provides for large shrub and tree masses arranged in a mosaic pattern throughout the Project (see Figure 2.1-10). Proposed trees range from broad-leaf evergreen to coniferous and deciduous species. Shrubs include large flowering species to low-growing groundcovers. Excluding groundcover, shrubs would range from 3 to 12 feet in height.

This landscaping, even absent any owner-specific residential landscaping, would result in off-site views to the property from elevated locations consisting of rows of roofs situated within a linear, but fairly intensive greensward. Although the roofs of the proposed homes could form a distinctive element for off-site viewers, over time, the mass would be diffused through the presence of large-tree canopy. This would be provided through maturation of a number of the potential tree types identified on the conceptual Landscape Plan that reach 20 to 60 feet in height and often would surpass a 30-foot roofline.

This type of lot sizing, the site orientation and pad preparation would be consistent with some other existing surrounding residential patterns within these larger views. One area in which the proposed development would differ is that much of the development in this area is focused on the highest portions of properties, including ridge lines and hill tops. The Sugarbush Project would avoid the most visible natural topographic features, siting development instead in a "saddle" between knolls on the south and north sides. The most remarkable (i.e., memorable, or "vivid") visual element in the site vicinity would remain unchanged. This is the large hill that provides the eastern and southern background to project views from the west and north. Undeveloped areas that appear visually "intact" from the west (i.e., the west-facing eastern slope) would become designated open space areas.

In the end, several items need to be balanced in order to understand whether or not the Project would conflict with the wider community's visual character. These elements include the:

- clustered nature of the development
- half-acre lot size, and
- stratified nature of pad creation contrasted against the:
- relative distance of most viewers from the site
- brief duration of sight-lines to the Project experienced by roadway users
- number of viewers with static views to the development
- level and type of development generally encompassed within these vistas
- siting of the proposed homes on lower elevations within the site
- development-wide HOA-maintained landscaping
- retention of the most distinctive topographic feature on the site
- retention of approximately 67 percent of the site in permanent open space, and the
- shielding of the residential uses provided by existing and intervening topography.

Overall, although the Project site would be different from the existing conditions in that approximately 33 percent of it would be developed, Project effects are not identified as conflicting with community-wide visual character or quality. The Project generally would be consistent with the community as a whole, and impacts would be **less than significant**.

Neighborhood Viewers—Long-term Visual Effects

Site Density

Eight of the proposed 45 residential lots would front 7 existing lots in the Lone Oak Lane neighborhood. This existing neighborhood contains 36 lots, with lot sizes ranging in size from 0.5 to 4.84 acres. The seven existing lots in the Lone Oak Lane neighborhood that border the Project site range in area from 0.59 to 2.24 acres and average 1.35 acres. The eight proposed residential lots would range in size from 0.54 to 0.77 acre. The Project's proposed building height would be 30 feet as compared to the 35-foot height allowed in the Lone Oak Lane neighborhood under current zoning, resulting in a minor lessening of vertical mass associated with the proposed structures over that otherwise allowed. Existing Rural Residential zoning within the Lone Oak neighborhood has the same minimum lot size (0.5 acre), animal regulations, building type, and allowable agricultural use types (horticulture, tree crops, and row and field crops) as would the proposed S88 zoning for the Project, potentially contributing to visual consistency with nearby off-site uses depending upon individual owner choice. The detention/bioretention basin lots south of the vehicle turn-around area on Lot F would be 0.67 acre (Lot E) and 0.78 acre (Lot F). These lots would provide approximately 1.5 acres immediately abutting the western property boundary that would not contain residential uses following Project implementation. As a result, these lots would tend to visually "expand" the area of the abutting residential lots (1, 5 and 6), which would additionally minimize perceived differences in lot size between the Proposed Project and the seven abutting residences.

As noted in Section 2.1.1.1 of this subchapter, the 21 lots in the Highview Trail neighborhood adjacent to the southwest corner of the Project have an average size of 0.87 acre. This is similar to residential lot sizes in the proposed development, which would range in size from 0.5 to 1.73 acres with an average of 0.61 acre. In addition, immediately southwest of the Lone Oak Lane/Lone Oak Road and Highview Trail neighborhoods is an area zoned for Mobile Home Residential Use, with an allowed density of 4.3 dwelling units/acre. Even within smaller neighborhood locales, some variety is present.

In addition, neighborhood character is not only based on residential lot size. Surrounding residences support substantial vegetation and neighbors are expected to value the open and undeveloped nature of the Project site. Also, the slope that provides the eastern site boundary is generally visible to abutting uses due to its height. Although the lot sizes proposed by the Project are somewhat smaller than the immediately surrounding area, the Project also is placing 67 percent of the Project site in open space. This set aside would contribute substantially to retention of undeveloped space in this community, and plays largely into whether or not the nature of the area would change due to Project implementation. The Landscape Plan required as part of Project design would continue the variety in landscaping in abutting developed areas, including the provision of canopy. All these elements together comprise local character.

Overall, the proposed use of minimum half-acre lots would not detract from the neighborhood's visual character due to lot size when the lot sizes and allowed uses are similar to abutting uses, and because the lots are proposed on the least visually prominent portion of the Project site.

Design Elements

Approximately five homes line the ridgeline south of Sugarbush along Holly Lane. These viewers would have open views to the site, but would be one-quarter of a mile distant. Their views to the Project overall would be interrupted by the knoll at the southern Project boundary, and would be backed by the distant mountains. Foreground views would continue to consist of the undeveloped steep canyons that intervene between Holly Lane and the Project (see Figure 2.1.2B). Approximately the same number of residences off existing Sugarbush Drive would have direct (and in some cases unobstructed) views onto the site. For these homes, the middle-ground view from private patios, yards and rooms could encompass the residential development, approximately 900 feet distant. Much of the development overall would be shielded from these viewers because of the large hill located south of their homes that blocks views to the southwestern portion of the Sugarbush property. The northern portion of the development could be seen, however, as could the extension of Sugarbush Drive (see discussion below for roadway extension).

Approximately 10 residences to the west and southwest of the Proposed Project in the Lone Oak Lane neighborhood are on lots abutting the Project property line. The foreground view from these lots would include the slopes proposed for the Sugarbush Project. Homes located beyond the first row of houses also could experience views to the new manufactured slopes of the Project if view orientation, elevation and lack of intervening structures allow. In this area, landform alteration associated with the Proposed Project would block currently more expansive views to the east.

Viewers with the most open and immediate views to the Project would be those abutting the western property line. The following localized discussion focuses on those viewers and addresses potential effects relative to intervening slopes and Project fire or retaining walls.

Slope Modification. Grading associated with proposed bioretention basins and residential lots would extend along 1,530 linear feet of the 2,600-linear foot western property line. Lots 1 through 8 would have fill slopes of between approximately 30 and 42 feet in height (see Table 2.1-1). The bioretention basin slopes would be substantially smaller. Lot F would have a slope height of approximately 4.3 feet at the northwest lot corner and 12.8 feet at the southwest lot corner. Lot E would have slopes of approximately 15.0 feet at the northwest corner and 7.3 feet at the southwest corner.

The most visible landform modification would result from grading for proposed lots 1 through 5, north of Lone Oak Lane, and would affect the view from three existing residential lots immediately abutting the property to the west. For these neighbors, whose residences are located at elevations lower than the proposed building pads, manufactured slopes in the foreground would comprise the post-Project view, rather than current views of natural slopes associated with the major eastern hill.

Residential uses just west of Lots 6 and 7 are farther back from the property line, with manufactured slopes and existing landscaping between the structures and the location of the proposed slopes. While views to the Project may exist from these houses, proposed landscaping would help to screen the manufactured slopes and both the existing and proposed manufactured slopes would block immediate views between the proposed and existing houses.

The houses on the parcels west and southwest of Lot 8 would have less restricted views of the Project due to the elevations of the existing residences and similar elevations proposed for Lot 8. For these neighbors, although the change in private view will be noticeable, the additional building setback and landscaping would buffer the immediacy of the new residences.

Design elements that would visually buffer the effects noted above include a 100-foot rear yard setback provided along the western edge of the Project, four times the distance required by the existing zoning. Because of the distance at which the proposed residences would be set back from the top of the proposed fill slope and required landscape plantings, immediately abutting residents in the Lone Oak Lane neighborhood would have limited views of the eight westernmost residences. Although detailed architectural design of the proposed homes is not required at this stage of Project planning, the Applicant has completed other developments in the County and has proposed a typical residential product. The design theme is a semi-custom approach, allowing for three-to-four floor plans using two-to-three architectural styles per floor plan and two-to-three color schemes per architectural style. The various combinations of floor plans, architectural styles and color schemes allow for a minimum of 12 different housing views. This residential product is similar to surrounding developer-designed neighborhoods and would be compatible with surrounding development.

The proximity of the proposed lots and the elevated nature of the proposed residential pads along the western perimeter of the Project also raises the issue of privacy, which would be expected to play a role in existing neighborhood character. The proposed landscaping on the manufactured slopes associated with lots 1 through 8 in the 100-foot building setbacks would buffer existing and proposed uses, and would provide a greater sense of privacy between existing and proposed homes than would the 25-foot setback required under the zoning code.

Project Walls. Additional visual elements would be related to Project fire and retaining walls. Adjacent to the residential lots, fire walls would be free-standing six-foot tall walls made of earthen-tone colored slump-stone concrete masonry units. They would extend along the southern boundaries of Lot F (i.e., immediately south of the vehicle turn-around area and also along the Lot 1 pad), on the northern boundary of the Lot 6 pad, and along the eastern boundaries of lots 11 and 33 through 45, and the southern edges of lots 8 through 11.

The fire walls located along the eastern portion of the Project theoretically could be visible from the west. They generally would be screened, however, by the residences they protect and interior lot landscaping. The walls located on the south side of the Project (along Lots 8 through 11) would not comprise primary view elements for viewers to the south. From the quarter-mile distance, they would simply comprise part of the development. Closer viewers (e.g., in limited views from residences immediately southwest of the Proposed Project) might see the wall if their view is to the south rather than west side of the Sugarbush property, but given their height, the walls would read as a standard privacy fencing. The northernmost fire wall would be located on the north side of the vehicle turn around area, south of the bioretention basin on Lot F, and close to the connection with Cleveland Trail. That wall may be seen by residents of the structure immediately south of Cleveland Trail and by some viewers from the existing Sugarbush Drive homes.

The on-site portion of the Lot F fire wall would be six feet high, while the off-site portion west of the development bubble for approximately 420 feet along the north side of Cleveland Trail would be eight feet high. Two residences with several out-buildings are located on the south side of Cleveland Trail (see Figure 1-6). Both of these locales have the main structures aligned north/south, with primary views to the east and west rather than to Cleveland Trail. The property that abuts the Sugarbush western property line immediately south of Cleveland Trail has vehicles, storage items, and a minimal amount of vegetation located between the proposed emergency access road and the main structure. The more westerly residence in this area is generally oriented north-south, with the narrowest portion of the structure facing north.

Views to improved Cleveland Trail would be substantially similar to current views. The western residence has dense canopy on its east and west sides. The fire wall would be located to the east, and would not comprise a major view element from this property. The more easterly residence is similarly generally aligned north-south, with views from the structure being generally east-west in focus. Because Cleveland Trail in this area would be excavated below grade, a viewer from that abutting property would be located one-to-three feet higher than the road along Cleveland Trail. The top five-to-seven feet of the fire wall on the north side of Cleveland Trail, therefore, would be visible, and would be backed by oaks and other mature vegetation located immediately north of the wall (see Figure 2.1-6 for depiction of this existing vegetation). The north end of the property currently contains farm animal housing (chicken coops/guinea hen pens) and other farm materials, which would be anticipated to continue to constitute localized dominant view elements. This wall would not be highly visible from the residence due to the intervening view elements. From the vicinity of existing Sugarbush Drive residences, the wall would generally line up with "line of sight," or be in profile rather than facing the viewer. This alignment, combined with the distance from the viewer, the fact that the wall would be downslope and that planting is proposed for the (intervening) Sugarbush Drive extension, would minimize any potential adverse effect.

Finally, two six-foot walls are proposed along the north sides of Lot 1 and 6, on the south side of the lots F and E bioretention basins, respectively. These two walls would extend east-west, and would be located adjacent to the pad only (i.e., up slope from adjacent viewers) and with views being in profile, or oblique, rather than straight on for all viewers from the west. In summary, all of these walls would have fairly limited visual exposure due to the low number of viewers and either screening by the proposed residential structures or limited viewing angles, as well as the proposed landscaping**.**

Retaining walls would be associated with roadway improvements to Cleveland Trail as well as detention/bioretention lots E and F and Lot 21. These walls also would be masonry units, but rather than being free-standing, they would be backed by retained soil. As a result, they would be potentially visible only from one side.

Internal to lots E and F, retaining walls would comprise part of the detention/bioretention basins. These retaining walls would comprise the north, east and southerly boundaries of the basins. The wall particulars are presented in Chapter 1.0, Section 1.2.1.2, "Walls and Fencing. On Lot E, a 0 to 5.5-foot-high retaining wall consisting of three straight segments formed into a general U-shape would be located within the northern portion of the lot. A zero to nine-foot-high berm would be connected to either terminus of the wall, forming an enclosed area, which would serve as the detention/bioretention basin. The retaining walls would be located down slope (below the viewer's sightline) from Streets B and E to the east and north, as well as Lot 6 to the south. Lot F would contain a zero to six-foot-high retaining wall to the north of Cleveland Trail. The retaining wall would be located down slope from the northern, eastern and southern lot lines. A five-to-six foot berm would form the western slope of the detention/bioretention basin.

Berms would comprise the westerly slope facing off-site uses; described as part of the modified slopes in the discussion above. These berms would have top elevations at the same elevations as the retaining walls. The wall, therefore, would be within the basins, and would not extend higher than the surrounding grade. The western side of the berms would be landscaped in accordance with the Conceptual Landscape Plan. In the southern portion of Lot F, the vehicular turn around area would contain a retaining wall on the south side of the road for approximately 90 feet. This portion of the retaining wall would be up to nine feet tall and would face northward. It would be blocked from view from the south by the slopes behind it. Additionally, it would curve southward to make room for the turn around, and so would not be visible from the west. This wall would extend westerly for approximately 420 feet along the southern side of the road, facing north. This wall would be between one and three feet tall.

The six-foot-high, 200-foot-long straight retaining wall proposed on the eastern edge of lot 21, would face westward. Oriented north-south, this wall would parallel the eastern boundary of the lot and would be 14 feet down slope from the eastern lot boundary. The wall generally would not be visible due to its down slope location (from the east), as well as shielding provided by the lot residence (from the west). Portions of the wall that would extend north or south beyond the width of the proposed structure would be anticipated to be screened from view by the landscaping internal to the lot. For viewers further to the west, it also would be shielded by intervening development/vegetation on other residential lots.

Project Roads. One road would be extended onto the Project (Sugarbush Drive), and one off-site road would be improved (Cleveland Trail) as part of the Project. Fire and retaining walls associated wit the Cleveland Trail extension from the vehicular turn-around area are described above under that heading.

A small number of homes along existing Sugarbush Drive would have views to the proposed extension of Sugarbush Drive. The continuation of Sugarbush Drive onto the property would be bordered by open space on both sides of the road for approximately 1,200 feet. This main access road leading to proposed residential pads would require substantial landform alteration. The cut and fill slopes along this road would range up to 30 feet in height, and would have 1.5 to 1 slopes in some areas. None of the slopes, however, would be very visible from off site.

The visual impact of these road-related cut and fill slopes is not assessed as a significant adverse impact for the following reasons. First, viewers largely would be restricted to future residents of the Project. Second, following implementation of the landscaping plan included as part of Project design, the extent of the proposed grading would be obscured by proposed vegetation. **No significant impact** is assessed**.**

The Project also would require improvements to off-site Cleveland Trail, required as a secondary emergency access route as part of the Project, at the area of intersection with Buena Creek Road and in the immediate visible area to the east. This road serves only the few residences located along it (fewer than five).

In order to bring the roadway up to standards required by the Fire Marshal as part of emergency access for Sugarbush, the Project would grade some very limited areas to a 28-foot width where existing grade would not support a 24-foot wide road, and add pavement where existing hardscape does not already total 24 feet in width. The crossing of Buena Creek (approximately a 50 foot span of road passing through sensitive riparian habitat) would be returned to its existing visual condition (dip pavement in concrete) following installation of the water and sewer lines in this portion of the road.

The intersection of Cleveland Trail and Buena Creek Road would be realigned, requiring installation of wider pavement. The improvement of existing pavement, even if it includes widening of some paved areas to the width of 24 feet, is not anticipated to result in any substantial detraction from existing views.

It is generally below line of sight, and consistent with other area intersections along Buena Creek Road. Impacts overall would be **less than significant**.

A small amount of tree trimming may be required as part of the Cleveland Trail improvement to a 24-foot wide paved width as well as routine maintenance activities (canopy trimming to 13.5 feet in height, vegetation thinning to the sides of the road) to ensure provision of appropriate emergency vehicle access. The Project would clear brush/hand trim woody elements/brush grasses for 16 feet from the road on either side of the existing right-of-way.

This thinning is required by the Fire Marshal and is an existing requirement for the few property owners taking access from Cleveland Trail. Although routine compliance with fire requirements would change details of close views to/along the roadway, given the density of abutting vegetation, any associated change to the viewscape would be less than substantial. In any event, the need for thinning or clearance of vegetation for fire safety is pre-existing condition required for emergency access to existing homes along Cleveland Trail and is not an impact required only because of the Proposed Project. **No impact** is identified.

Conclusion

The Project site does not contain existing permanent open space set aside or an adopted view corridor, either of which would constitute a protected view. Similarly, a different use is not proposed for the property from that expected under the adopted General Plan and NCM Subregional Plan (residential use). Considered overall, the Project is not found to result in substantial changes to community visual character on the localized level with regard to lot size/density, slope construction, potential architectural style or fire/retaining wall inclusion. Residents of the lots abutting the western property boundary would, however, lose existing views to open space. This is because the intervening slopes would be in the foreground, and block views further to the east. This is a substantial change to the character of the currently far more expansive view experienced by these very localized viewers. As previously noted, however, the Project would leave approximately 67 percent of the site—the highest and generally most visible portions of the site—undeveloped. This would lessen Project effects perceived by more distant and/or elevated viewers.

As a result, in terms of long-term impact significance, the views of the Project site from adjacent properties to the west would substantially change. Nonetheless, because of the relatively low number of viewers immediately affected, the consideration that the views lost are not part of identified/adopted view corridors, and consideration that ultimately views would consist mainly of landscaped slopes and/or private backyard landscaping, long-term impacts assessed under CEQA are considered to be **less than significant.**

Neighborhood Viewers—Short-term (Construction Period) Visual Effects

Construction of the proposed residential development would require several types and quantities of heavy construction equipment for site and pad preparation. Views into the Project site during the construction period would capture raw soil, and newly cut or filled slopes, as well as construction equipment, which would contrast with the existing conditions. While these views could be unsightly and would disrupt the existing visual character of the Project area, they would be temporary, as grading is anticipated to take four-to-six months.

At the conclusion of grading, landscaping on Project slopes would be installed. Slopes along the western boundary of the property would remain partially exposed until Project landscape vegetation would mature, and provide coverage nearing 100 percent of the manufactured slopes. This encroachment into

the view of these homes of graded slopes is not considered adequately addressed through the provisions of the Project-wide Conceptual Landscape Plan. A **significant impact** is identified. (**Impact AE-1**)

Visual impacts associated with connections of the Project sewer and water lines into existing facilities under Buena Creek Road would be extremely temporary and restricted in space. Both water and sewer lines would be connected during improvements to Cleveland Trail overall. The sewer line jacking and boring, which would add a small pit/excavation area south of the intersection of these two roads along Buena Creek Road, would be open for approximately three to five days before refill and paving. The focused and very temporary nature of these effects along this public road render them **less than significant.**

2.1.2.3 *Removal or Substantial Change of Features Contributing to Character*

Guideline for the Determination of Significance

A significant impact to aesthetics would occur if a proposed project would:

3. Result in the removal or substantial adverse change of one or more features that contribute to the valued visual character or image of the neighborhood, community, or localized area, including but not limited to landmarks (designated), historic resources, trees, and rock outcroppings.

Guideline No. 3 is based on the County's Guidelines for Determining Significance and Report Format and Content Requirements – Visual Resources (July 30, 2007).

Analysis

The issue of substantial adverse change of features contributing to valued visual character or image of the neighborhood/localized area as a result of *introduction* of contrasting features was addressed above with regard to landform modification and form of proposed residential uses in Section 2.1.2.2.

This section focuses on the issue of *removal* of features that contribute to the visual setting. The Project does not contain designated landmarks, historic structures, landmark trees (i.e., stands identified in community planning documents), or rock outcroppings. The primary elements contributing to the visual character of this localized area are the expansive areas of sage scrub, the presence of intermittent oak stands, the large canyon located just southerly of the Project, and the large hill that comprises the eastern portion of the property. The large canyon would not be affected by Project development—it is primarily off site. As discussed throughout the rest of this subchapter (see also Subchapter 2.2, Biological Resources), over half of the site is proposed to be set into permanent open space. The clustering of the Project homes into the southwestern portion of the property retains a large block of sage and accompanying oak stands in a protected state that will maintain views of open space on site from distant views and some closer vantage points (refer to Figure 2.1-1).

Although potentially characterized as adverse by potential viewers, given their relatively limited visibility, the lower number of viewers for whom these changes would comprise foreground views, and the retention of open space and the primary topographic features that draw the eye, these changes are considered **less than significant.**

2.1.2.4 *Local Policies, Ordinances, Adopted Plans*

Guideline for the Determination of Significance

Project impacts to aesthetics would be significant if a project would:

4. Not comply with applicable goals, policies or requirements of an applicable County Community Plan, Subregional Plan, or Historic District's Zoning.

Guideline No. 4 is based on the County's Guidelines for Determining Significance and Report Format and Content Requirements – Visual Resources (July 30, 2007).

Analysis

Community Plan

The Project site is not within an area that is regulated by a community plan. Therefore, the Proposed Project would not conflict with any goals, policies or requirements of a community plan. **No impact is identified**.

North County Metropolitan Subregional Plan

Goal No. 4 of the NCM Subregional Plan is "Protect Environmental Resources," in part due to recognition that the Plan area contains "scenic rugged terrain which is not suitable for urbanization." The Project has been designed to preserve approximately 67 percent of the project site as open space, leaving the steeper and more rugged terrain onsite undeveloped, thereby preserving valuable environmental resources. The Proposed Project would preserve the scenic rugged terrain, placing the residential development west of the higher elevation steep slopes on site that contribute to existing visual conditions. **No impact** is identified.

Historic District

The Project site is not located within or near a national, state or County historic district. **No impact is identified**.

Resource Protection Ordinance (RPO)

With regard to potential visual effects associated with landform alteration, the slope analysis performed for the subject property shows that approximately 17.93 acres, or 15.5 percent of the site, have natural slopes exceeding 25 percent with an elevation rise of greater than 50 feet (see Appendix C). Applying those criteria, steep slope land occurs in the northeast portion of the property and on the western face of the northwest-trending landform, almost wholly within areas proposed for open space set aside. The proposed project all but eliminates any impact to these slopes. Only two lots (11 and 33) show any incursion at all into steep slopes. On Lot 11, the total amount of steep slope lands on the parcel is 1.03 acres and the proposed encroachment would be 8.07 percent. Lot 33 contains 0.99 acre of steep slope lands and encroachment would total 8.57 percent. Neither of these lots exceeds the 10 percent allowable encroachment. In addition, there is no visual impact associated with these slope encroachment areas because views to the cut area would be screened by the lot residences and associated vegetation. The Proposed Project is consistent with the RPO, and **no visual impact** would occur.

2.1.3 Cumulative Impact Analysis

Figure 1-8 and Table 1-1 of this EIR were reviewed for cumulative projects relevant for the issue of aesthetics. The list includes five projects that would be located within portions of the Project viewshed with sight lines to Sugarbush property area proposed for development (see Figure 2.1-11). The projects include the potential for clearance of chaparral for water line maintenance by VID (No. 52), and four potential small single-family residential projects (Nos. 63, 64, 65 and 66).

The actual locations of the potential VID clearing efforts for maintenance have not been identified, but the habitat identified for clearing is shrub based and impacts would be located at grade. This clearance required for maintenance activities would address focused maintenance areas and would vary in time based on required access to pipeline. These efforts would not result in changes to mass or development scale within the viewshed. No cumulative adverse visual effect is identified and the VID project is not additionally addressed in this discussion.

The four development projects are in different stages in planning. None of the projects identified significant impacts for the issue of aesthetics. Tai Estates (No. 63) would consist of six residential lots located on an approximately 47-acre parcel. Much of the property consists of ridgeline and steep slopes. Approximately 25 acres are currently proposed to be retained in open space. This property abuts the eastern edge of the Sugarbush Project, and includes the high hill so visible to surrounding viewers. The project is currently addressing issues related to secondary emergency access and the need to obtain a habitat loss permit. If it is able to move forward, it is possible that associated residences could be located at top of slope and be visible to viewers from the north, west and south that also would see Sugarbush development.

The Leese property (No. 64) is located immediately west of Sugarbush along Cleveland Trail. Three residential lots would take access off of Cleveland Trail and Bella Vita Lane. It is expected that new homes would resemble the existing homes in this area, and largely be obscured by the dense vegetation associated with Buena Creek and the retained vegetation within the Sugarbush panhandle north of Cleveland Trail from the north, south and west. From elevated locations (particularly from the west) roofs at a minimum could be visible among the canopy. From the east, these structures would not be visible due to intervening vegetation (including oaks) and topography associated with the northern section of the Sugarbush development.

The Kawano property (No. 65) would place eight residential lots on 10.27 acres. The project, located in a north-south strip abutting Buena Creek Road on the south side, has already been graded. The most direct views of Sugarbush and Kawano would be obtained from the northern portion of the Kawano development, where viewers looking southerly could see not only their own development, but also the southern portion of the development bubble on Sugarbush, south of the Buena Creek drainage and across the intervening natural slopes. More distant viewers from south facing slopes to the north would probably see both the sites at once, although portions of the lower elevation pads at Kawano might be obscured by other developed uses northerly of them, both on and off the Kawano site. From the west, viewers at higher elevations could probably see both projects, although the Kawano project would be expected to be visually absorbed into abutting and very similar development. (The fact that the development is sited on a narrow strip minimizes overall visual differentiation from adjacent development.)

The proposed Fredas Hill project (No. 66) is located near to the northern boundary of the Sugarbush property, east of existing Sugarbush Road. Fredas Hill includes 13 single-family homes on 21.65 acres. Landforms in the northern portion of the Sugarbush property, to the south of Fredas Hill, provide a backdrop for the proposed Fredas Hill project, and serve to block views of that project from most of the viewers west of Sugarbush. Most of the observers that would view the developed areas of the Sugarbush

project would not see the Fredas Hill project, and many viewers with views to both projects would see primarily open space areas on Sugarbush. Some viewers to the west would see both developments, with one or two Fredas Hill lots being visible to these viewers. The reader is referred to Figure 2.1-2C, Photograph 6 for a view from the west that would include both developments. The reader is also referred to Figure 2.1-2A, Photograph 1 for a view of the Fredas Hill project that shows how the topography in the area restricts views to the proposed developed portions of the Sugarbush property for viewers who would see the Fredas Hill property.

Overall, four residential projects with a total maximum number of 30 residential lots could be developed in the immediate vicinity of the Project. These projects would contribute developed elements to the expansive views available in the area. Residences within these projects would be situated on lots of a size consistent with the existing and planned visual character of the wider community. While existing landforms on Sugarbush and in the Project vicinity would be altered through development of residential uses, these overall landform and visual changes are anticipated in existing land use designations, which generally control estate residential development throughout the area. The consistent nature of proposed uses (residential, with outbuildings, some agricultural uses, etc.), the proposed dense landscaping, small number of viewers in proximity, with the greater number of viewers being more distant (and for which the Project locale would only provide one element within a more expansive viewshed), results in Sugarbush providing a less than considerable contribution to the overall cumulative effect.

Unknown but potential hill top/ridgeline development associated with the Tai project could substantially affect the character of the steep the slope located east of Sugarbush. This hill top currently appears completely natural, with no development adjacent. It provides a strong topographic element in this area. Potential development upon it would have the potential to affect local character. Because analysis for that project is not complete, no conclusion is drawn here regarding whether or not development of that project might result in an adverse cumulative effect. Regardless, even if a cumulative effect related to hilltop development should occur based on more detailed design not currently available, the Proposed Project would not contribute to that effect as Sugarbush Project development would be located down slope on the lower and less visually prominent slopes. As Sugarbush would avoid development on the higher elevation steep slopes, it would not contribute to that potential cumulative impact.

In conclusion, the five proposed residential developments generally would not result in cumulatively significant visual character impacts. Where there is the potential for a significant cumulative impact, the Sugarbush development would not contribute to it. The contribution to cumulative impacts from the Sugarbush Project would be **less than significant**.

2.1.4 Significance of Impacts Prior to Mitigation

Impact AE-1 Given the necessary Project grading/slope creation along the western Project boundary, routine Project planting would not adequately address short-term visual effects to adjacent off-site viewers. A significant impact was identified to these viewers until vegetation would adequately obscure the manufactured slope.

2.1.5 Mitigation

The following mitigation measure would reduce potentially significant visual impacts to less than significant levels.

M-AE-1 Prior to the issuance of a grading permit, the subdivider shall obtain approval from the Director of the Department of Planning and Land Use (DPLU) of the detailed and final

Landscape Plan for visual screening of manufactured slopes. This Project must conform to the following:

- The detailed Landscape Plan must conform to the Concept Landscape Plan discussed in this EIR, and also will include incorporation of denser planting and larger container stock along the western property line south of Cleveland Trail. Container stock will be increased one size compared to that normally required for shrubs and trees. For example, where one-gallon containers or 24-inch planter boxes would normally be required, five-gallon containers or 36-inch planter boxes will be required for plantings on the slope along the western boundary. Denser than normal plantings will also be required as allowed by the approved Fire Protection Plan (FPP).

- ~~The detailed Landscape Plan must be approved prior to obtaining any building or other permit pursuant to the Project Site Plan, and prior to commencement of construction or use of the property in reliance on the Site Plan.~~

- The detailed Landscape Plan must conform to the requirements of the County's ~~Landscape~~ Water Conservation and Landscaping Ordinance and Design Manual, and Project FPP.

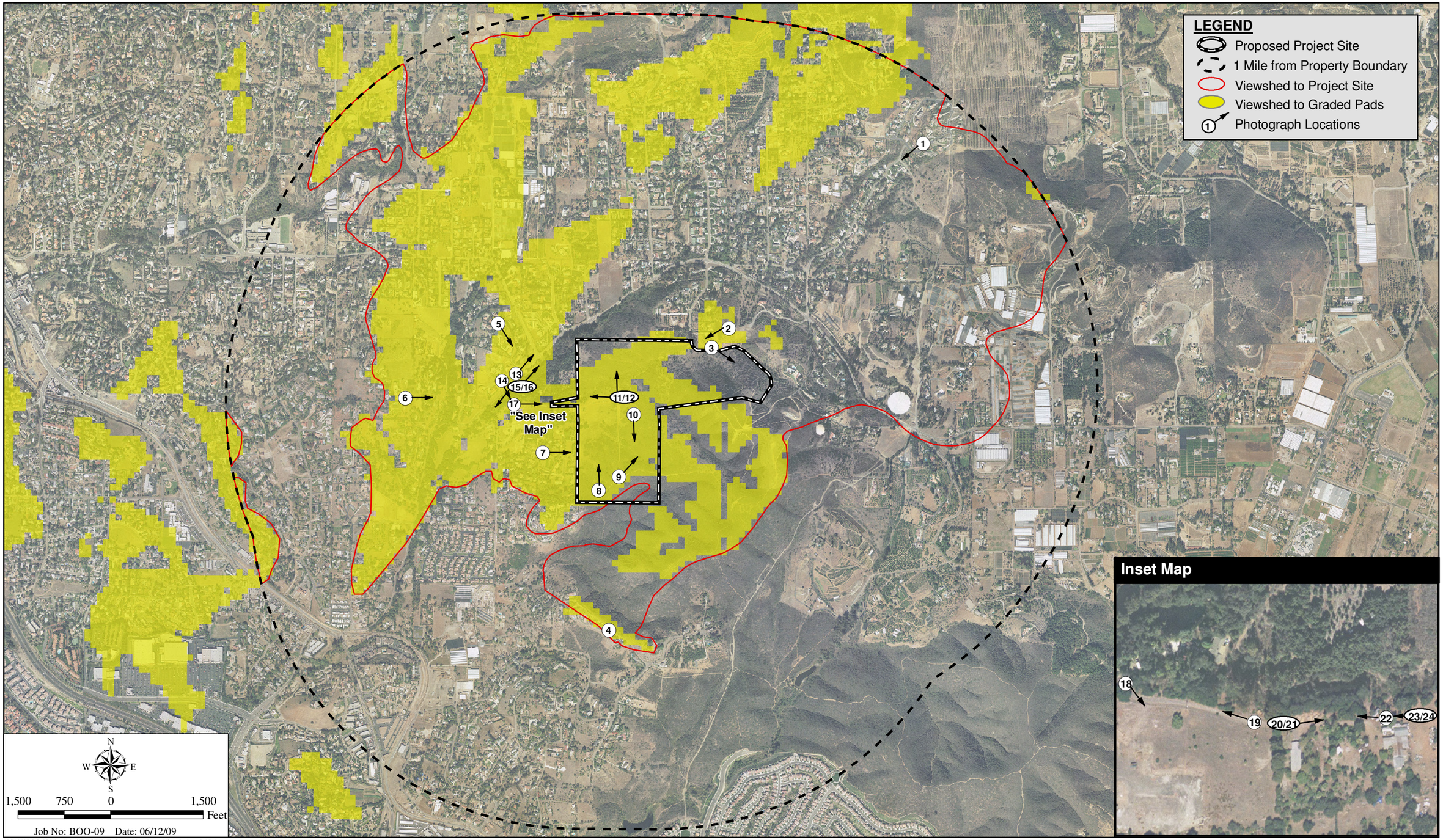
- The detailed Landscape Plan also must address the maintenance of proposed landscaping and required fire walls. Ongoing maintenance will be the responsibility of the private HOA. All landscaping is required to be maintained in a healthy, disease-free condition for the life of the Project.

2.1.6 Conclusion

A significant effect was identified relative to loss of view of vegetated slopes by residents of the Lone Oak neighborhood abutting the western property boundary during the grading and construction phase of the Project. Implementation of the landscaping plan identified in M-AE-1 would reduce the potentially significant impacts to less than significant levels based on the requirement for more dense and mature landscaping to be planted pursuant to an approved Landscape Plan, which would minimize the length of time that the newly constructed slopes would be evident.

Table 2.1-1
MANUFACTURED SLOPE HEIGHTS FOR RESIDENTIAL LOTS

Lot	Maximum Cut (feet)	Maximum Fill (feet)
1	0	30
2	0	34
3	0	34
4	0	35
5	1	30
6	0	42
7	5	38
8	14	40
9	40	0
10	40	0
11	30	0
12	24	0
13	35	0
14	40	3
15	40	0
16	26	3.5
17	24	3.5
18	25	4
19	25	5
20	25	6.5
21	24	6.5
22	0	17.5
23	0	4
24	0	4
25	0	4.5
26	0	4.5
27	0	5
28	7	0
29	20	0
30	15	8.5
31	12	0
32	7.5	0
33	20	0
34	33	0
35	47	0
36	25	0
37	18	8
38	10	8.5
39	32	8
40	37	6
41	30	6
42	25	5
43	21	0
44	26	0
45	27	5



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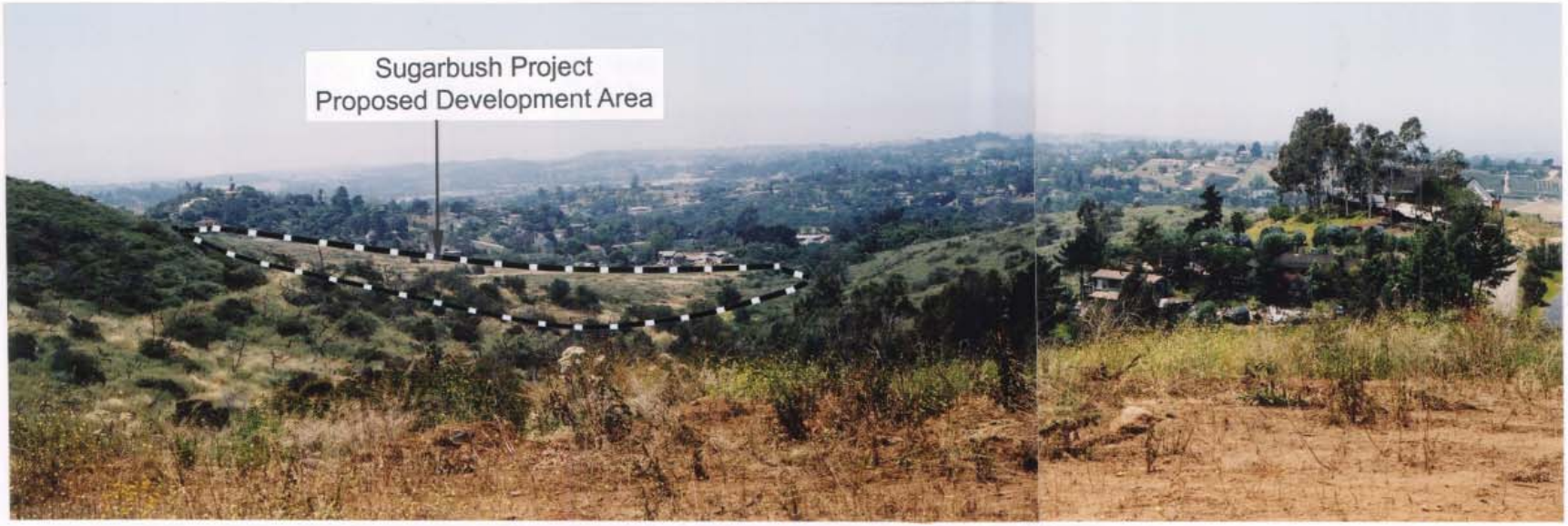
Viewshed Map/Photograph Locations

SUGARBUSH RESIDENTIAL PROJECT

Figure 2.1-1

Photograph 1. View to south from Emma Road.



Photograph 2. Southwest view from Fredas Hill.

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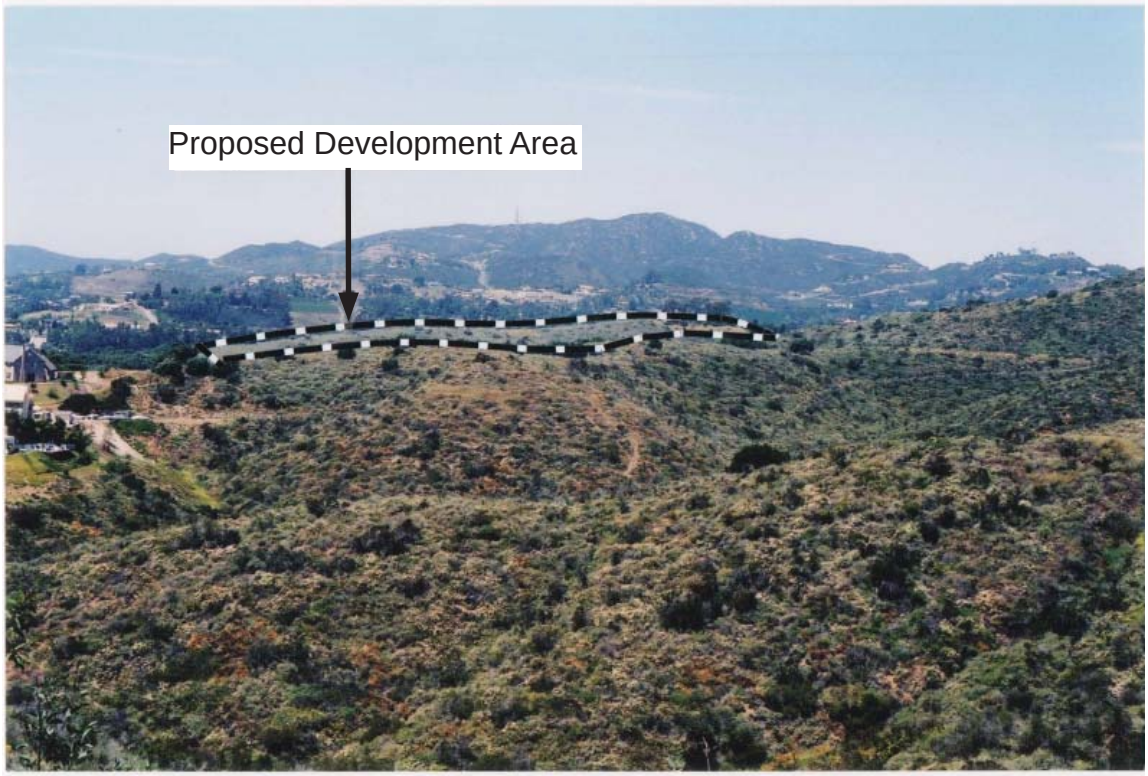
Views to Sugarbush Property from Off-site Locations

SUGARBUSH RESIDENTIAL PROJECT

Figure 2.1-2A

Photograph 3. Easterly view of open space from residence on Sugarbush Road.



Photograph 4. View to north from Holly Lane.

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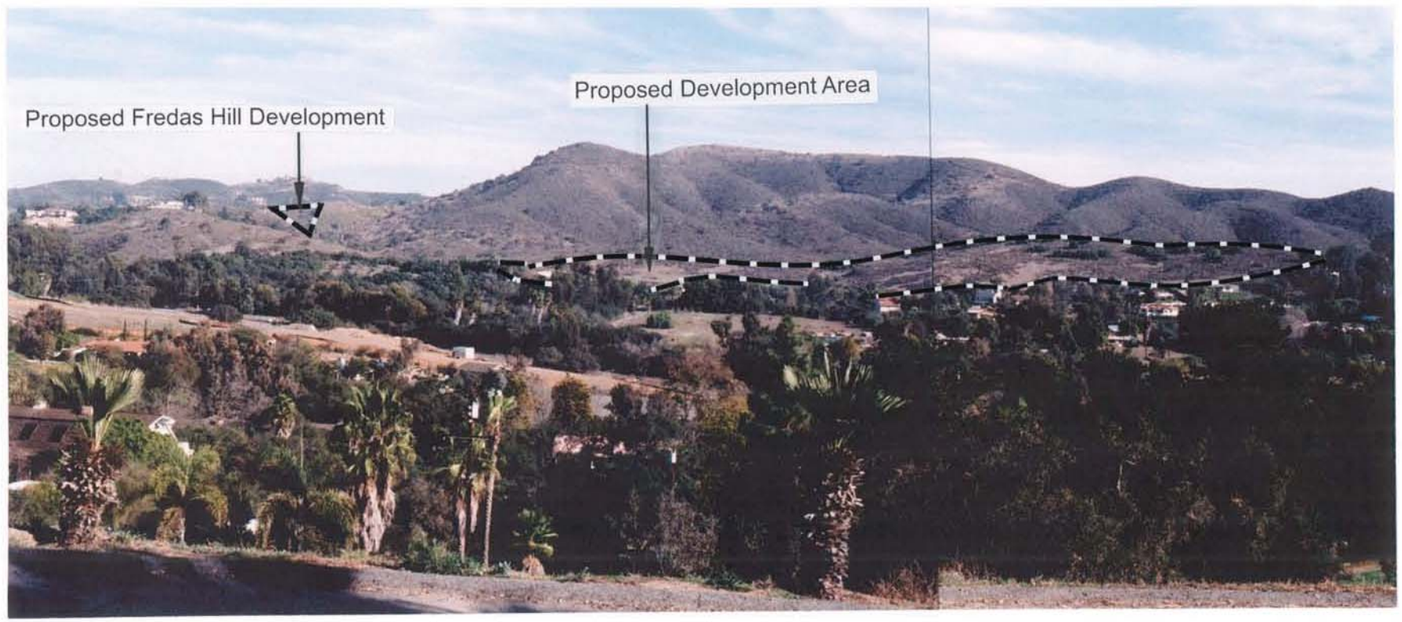
Views to Sugarbush Property from Off-site Locations

SUGARBUSH RESIDENTIAL PROJECT

Figure 2.1-2B

Photograph 5. Easterly view from Vista Royal Drive



Photograph 6. Easterly view from unnamed private road west of Buena Creek Road.

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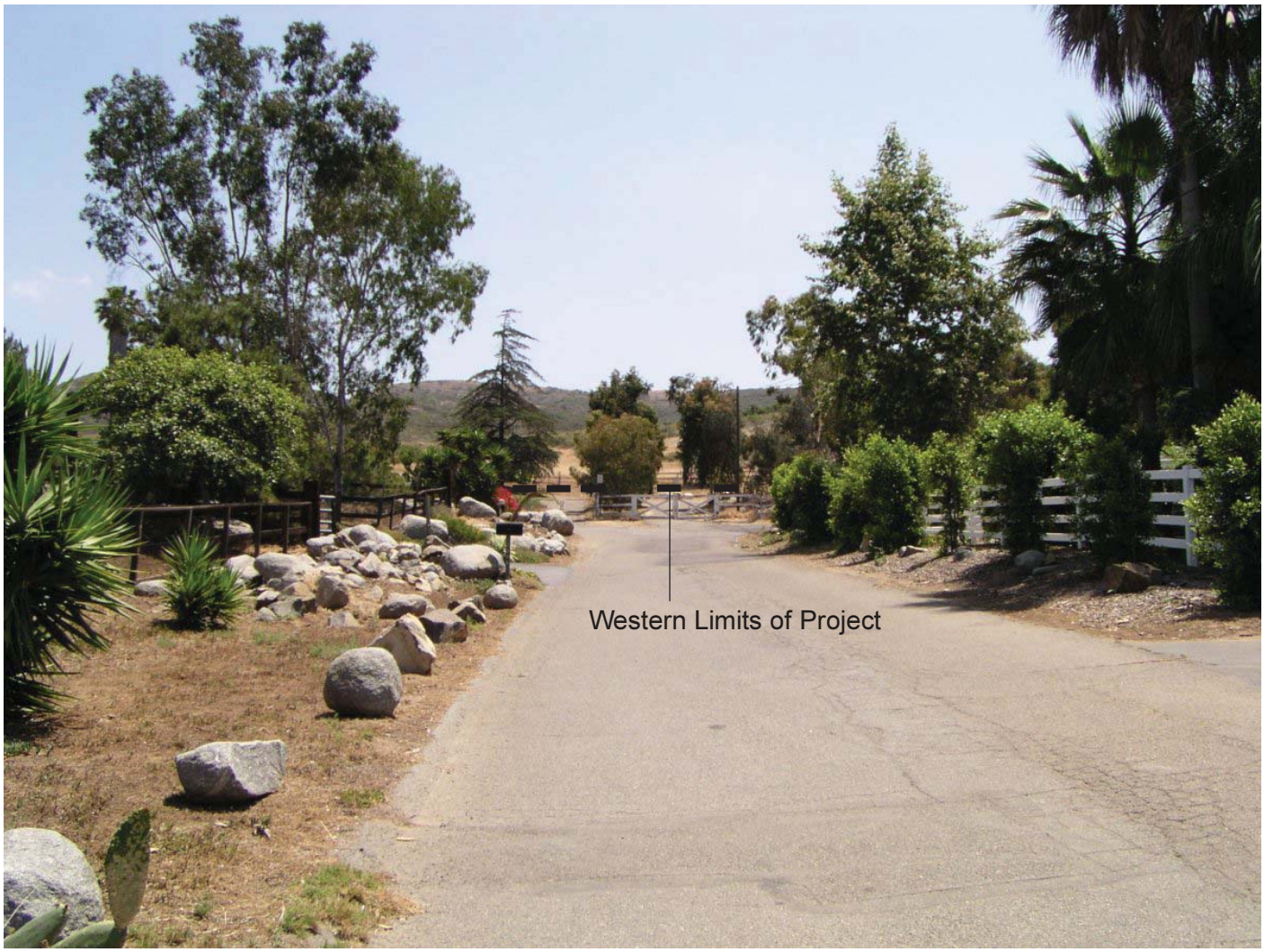
Views to Sugarbush Property from Off-site Locations

SUGARBUSH RESIDENTIAL PROJECT

Figure 2.1-2C



Photograph 7. View east to Project from Lone Oak Lane

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Views to Sugarbush Property from Off-site Locations

SUGARBUSH RESIDENTIAL PROJECT

Figure 2.1-2D

Photograph 8. North and east view from southern Project limits.

Photograph 9. Northeasterly view from southwest end of Project site.

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Views to Sugarbush Property from On-site Locations

SUGARBUSH RESIDENTIAL PROJECT

Figure 2.1-3A

Photograph 10. Southerly view from base of on-site eastern hills.

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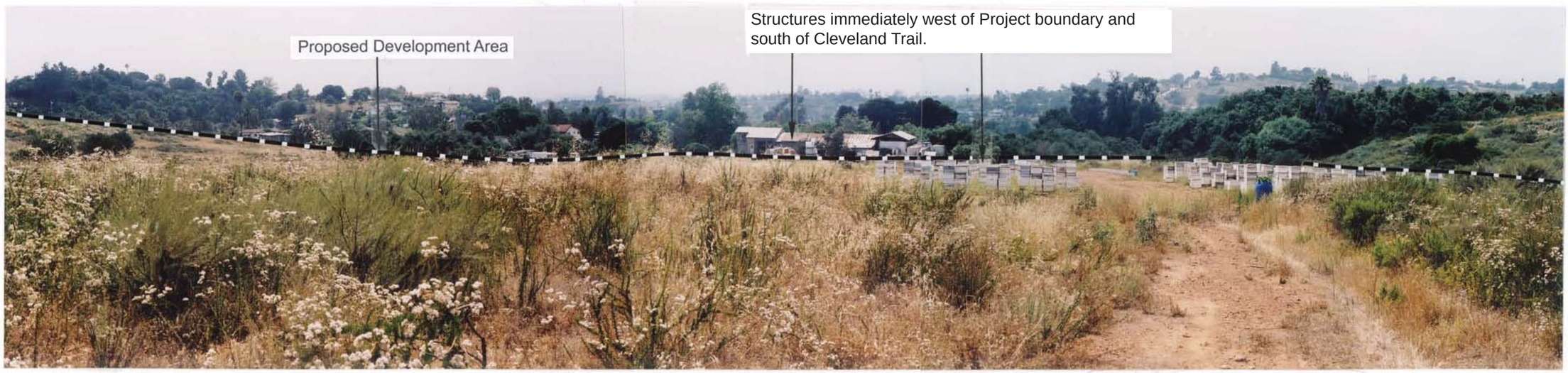
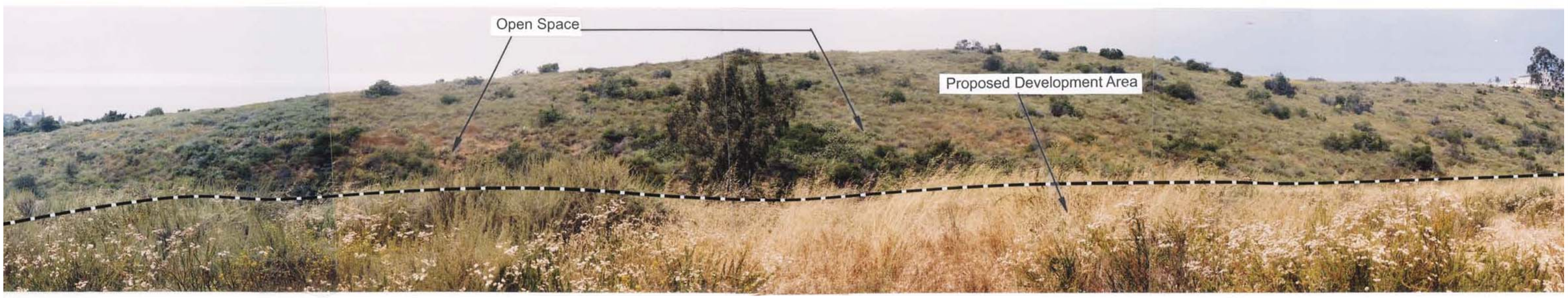
Views to Sugarbush Property from On-site Locations

SUGARBUSH RESIDENTIAL PROJECT

Figure 2.1-3B



Photograph 11. View west from north-central part of Project site.



Photograph 12. Northerly view of open space from center of Project site.

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Views to Sugarbush Property from On-site Locations

SUGARBUSH RESIDENTIAL PROJECT

Figure 2.1-3C

Photograph 13: Cleveland Trail at Buena Creek Road looking northeast

Photograph 14: Cleveland Trail at Buena Creek Road looking southeast

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Views of Cleveland Trail and Buena Creek Road Intersection

SUGARBUSH RESIDENTIAL PROJECT

Figure 2.1-4A

Photograph 15: Buena Creek Road from Cleveland Trail looking northeast

Photograph 16: Buena Creek Road from Cleveland Trail looking southwest

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Views of Cleveland Trail and Buena Creek Road Intersection

SUGARBUSH RESIDENTIAL PROJECT

Figure 2.1-4B

Photograph 17: Cleveland Trail looking eastward from creek area, small area of canopy and containers

Photograph 18: Cleveland Trail at easterly turn; open fields to south

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Views of Cleveland Trail

SUGARBUSH RESIDENTIAL PROJECT

Figure 2.1-5A

Photograph 19: Looking west along Cleveland Trail

Photograph 20: Looking eastward along Cleveland Trail

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Views of Cleveland Trail

SUGARBUSH RESIDENTIAL PROJECT

Figure 2.1-5B

Photograph 21: Looking east at proposed fire wall location along Cleveland Trail

Photograph 22: Looking west at proposed fire wall location along Cleveland Trail

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Location of Off-site Fire Wall along Cleveland Trail

SUGARBUSH RESIDENTIAL PROJECT

Figure 2.1-6

Photograph 23: Looking west at property line to Cleveland Trail

Photograph 24: Chicken coops placed on Sugarbush property, Cleveland Trail beyond chain link fence

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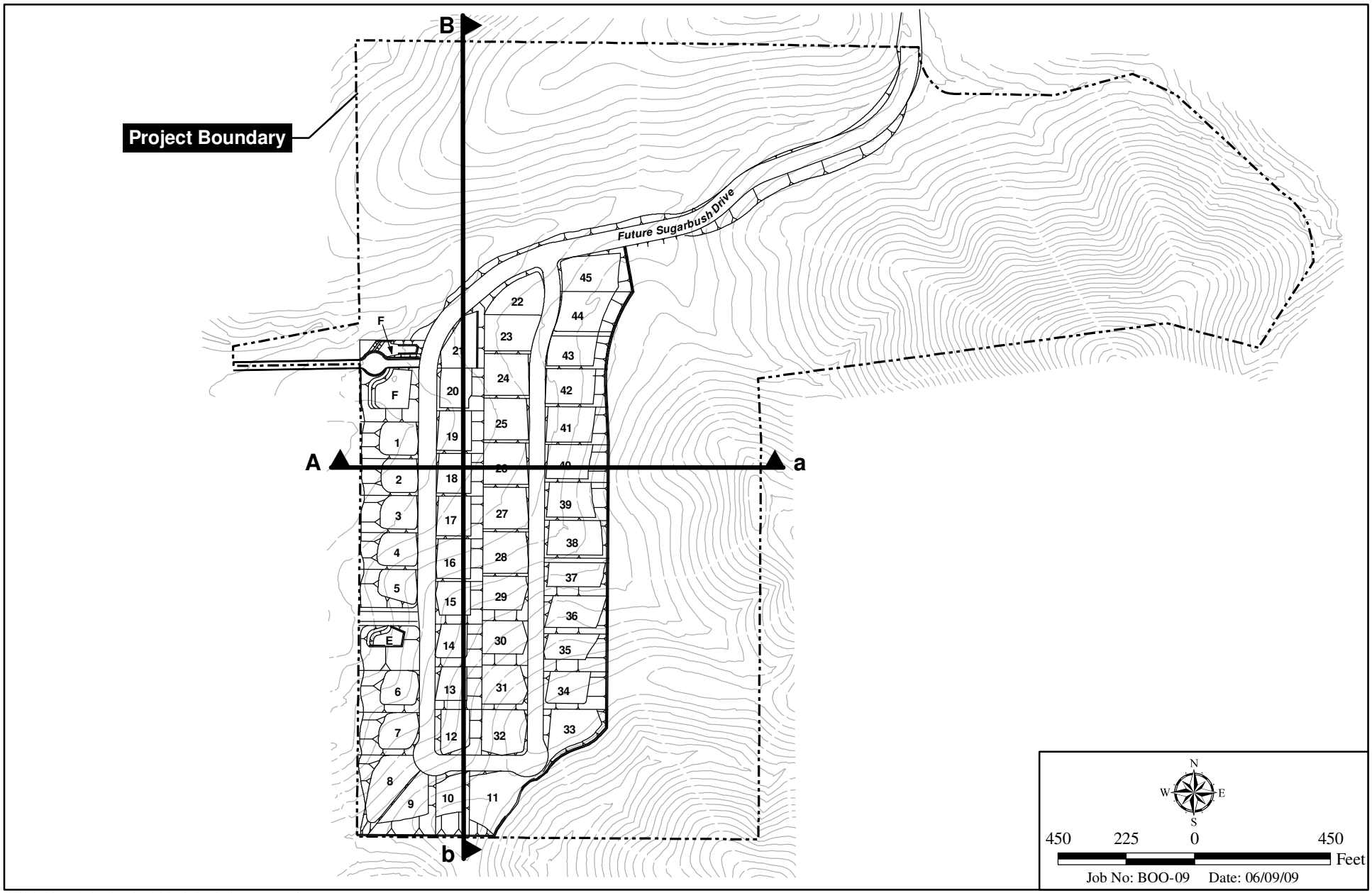
Off-site Uses at Sugarbush Property Line and Cleveland Trail

SUGARBUSH RESIDENTIAL PROJECT

Figure 2.1-7



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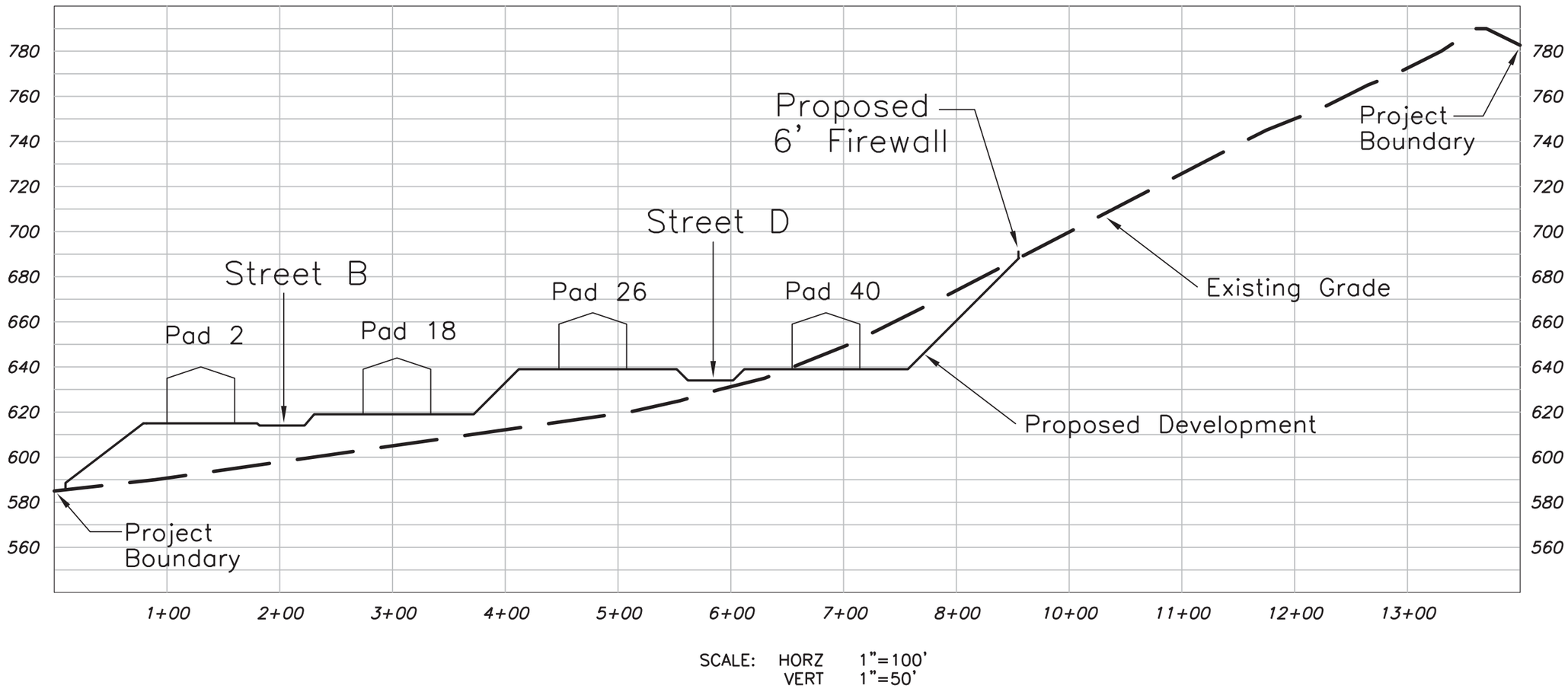
Cross-section Key Map

SUGARBUSH RESIDENTIAL PROJECT

Figure 2.1-8



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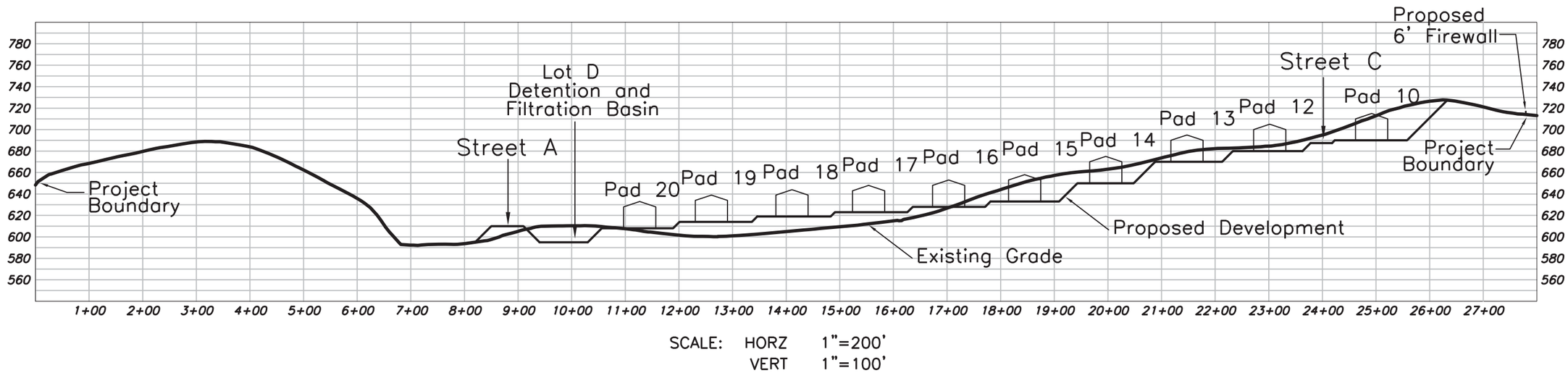
Cross-section "A"

SUGARBUSH RESIDENTIAL PROJECT

Figure 2.1-9A



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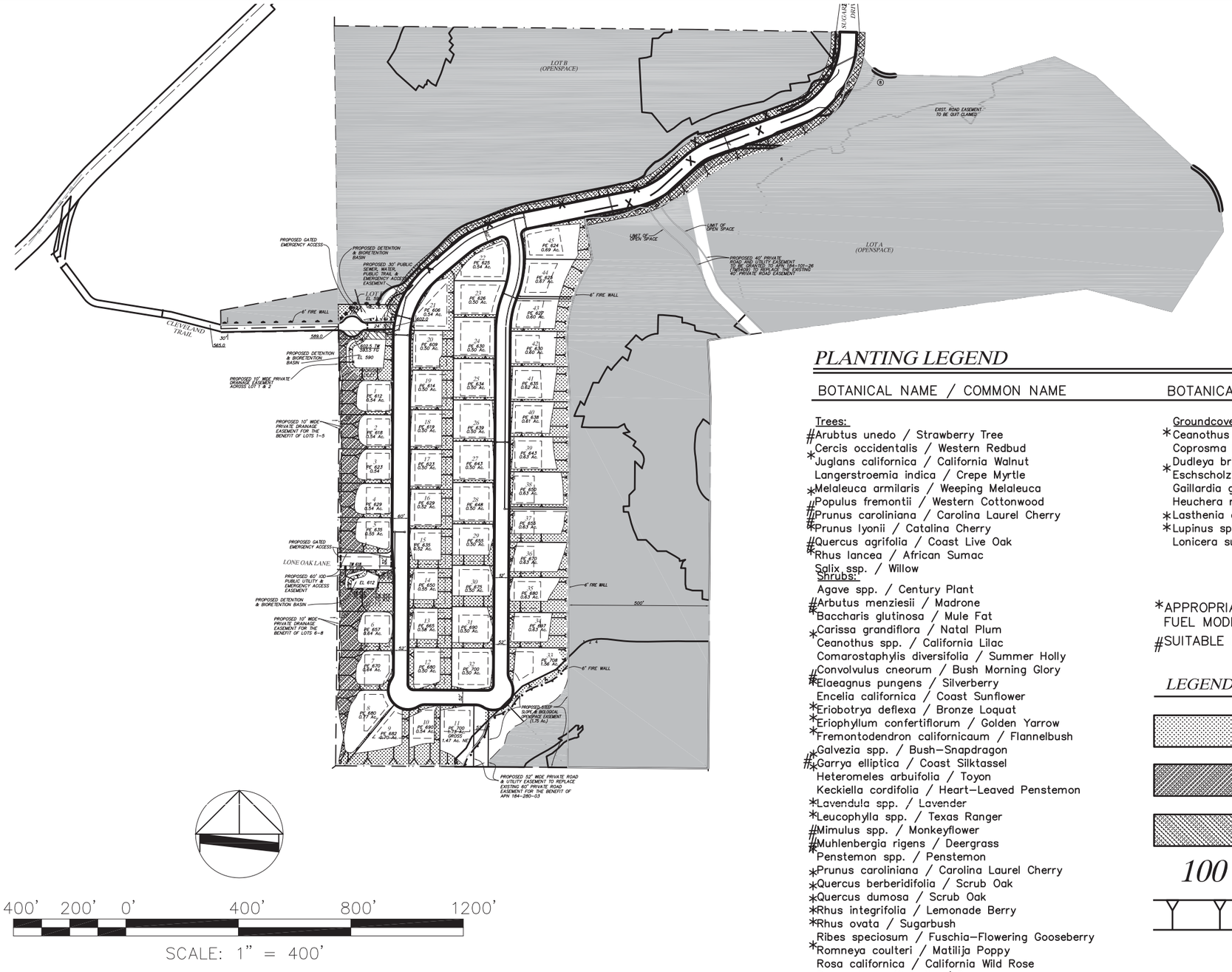
Cross-section "B"

SUGARBUSH RESIDENTIAL PROJECT

Figure 2.1-9B



PLANTING LEGEND

BOTANICAL NAME / COMMON NAME	BOTANICAL NAME / COMMON NAME
Trees:	Groundcovers, Annuals, Perennials, and Vines
#Arubtus unedo / Strawberry Tree	*Ceanothus spp. / California Lilac (ground cover varieties)
*Cercis occidentalis / Western Redbud	Coprosma kirkii / Creeping Coprosma
Juglans californica / California Walnut	*Dudleya brittonii / Britton's Chalk Dudleya
Langerstroemia indica / Crepe Myrtle	Eschscholzia californica / California Poppy
*Melaleuca armilaris / Weeping Melaleuca	Gaillardia grandiflora / Blanket Flower
#Populus fremontii / Western Cottonwood	Heuchera maxima / Coral Bells
#Prunus caroliniana / Carolina Laurel Cherry	*Lasthenia californica / Common Goldfields
#*Prunus lyonii / Catalina Cherry	*Lupinus spp. / Lupine
#Quercus agrifolia / Coast Live Oak	Lonicera subspicata / Chaparral Honeysuckle
*Rhus lancea / African Sumac	
Salix ssp. / Willow	
Shrubs:	
Agave spp. / Century Plant	
#Arbutus menziesii / Madrone	
*Baccharis glutinosa / Mule Fat	
Carissa grandiflora / Natal Plum	
*Ceanothus spp. / California Lilac	
Comarostaphylis diversifolia / Summer Holly	
Convolvulus cneorum / Bush Morning Glory	
#Elaeagnus pungens / Silverberry	
Encelia californica / Coast Sunflower	
*Eriobotrya deflexa / Bronze Loquat	
*Eriophyllum confertiflorum / Golden Yarrow	
*Fremontodendron californicaum / Flannelbush	
Galvezia spp. / Bush-Snapdragon	
#*Garrya elliptica / Coast Silktassel	
Heteromeles arbuifolia / Toyon	
Keckiella cordifolia / Heart-Leaved Penstemon	
*Lavendula spp. / Lavender	
*Leucophylla spp. / Texas Ranger	
#Mimulus spp. / Monkeyflower	
#Muhlenbergia rigens / Deergrass	
*Penstemon spp. / Penstemon	
*Prunus caroliniana / Carolina Laurel Cherry	
*Quercus berberidifolia / Scrub Oak	
*Quercus dumosa / Scrub Oak	
*Rhus integrifolia / Lemonade Berry	
*Rhus ovata / Sugarbush	
Ribes speciosum / Fuschia-Flowering Gooseberry	
*Romneya coulteri / Matilija Poppy	
Rosa californica / California Wild Rose	
Rosmarinus officinalis / Rosemary	
Zauschneria californica / California Fuschia	

*APPROPRIATE FOR USE ALONG STREET "A" FUEL MODIFICATION ZONE

#SUITABLE FOR SCREENING RETAINING WALL

LEGEND:

- MANUFACTURED SLOPES TO BE PLANTED
- ENHANCED AREAS: INCLUDE MORE PLANTS FOR A FASTER MATURE LANDSCAPE PER MITIGATION MEASURE M-AE-1
- STREET "A" ROADSIDE FUEL MODIFICATION ZONES
- 100 — PROPOSED LOT NUMBER, WITH PROPOSED ELEVATION (PE) AND SIZE
- PROPOSED SLOPE EMBANKMENTS (2:1 MAX)

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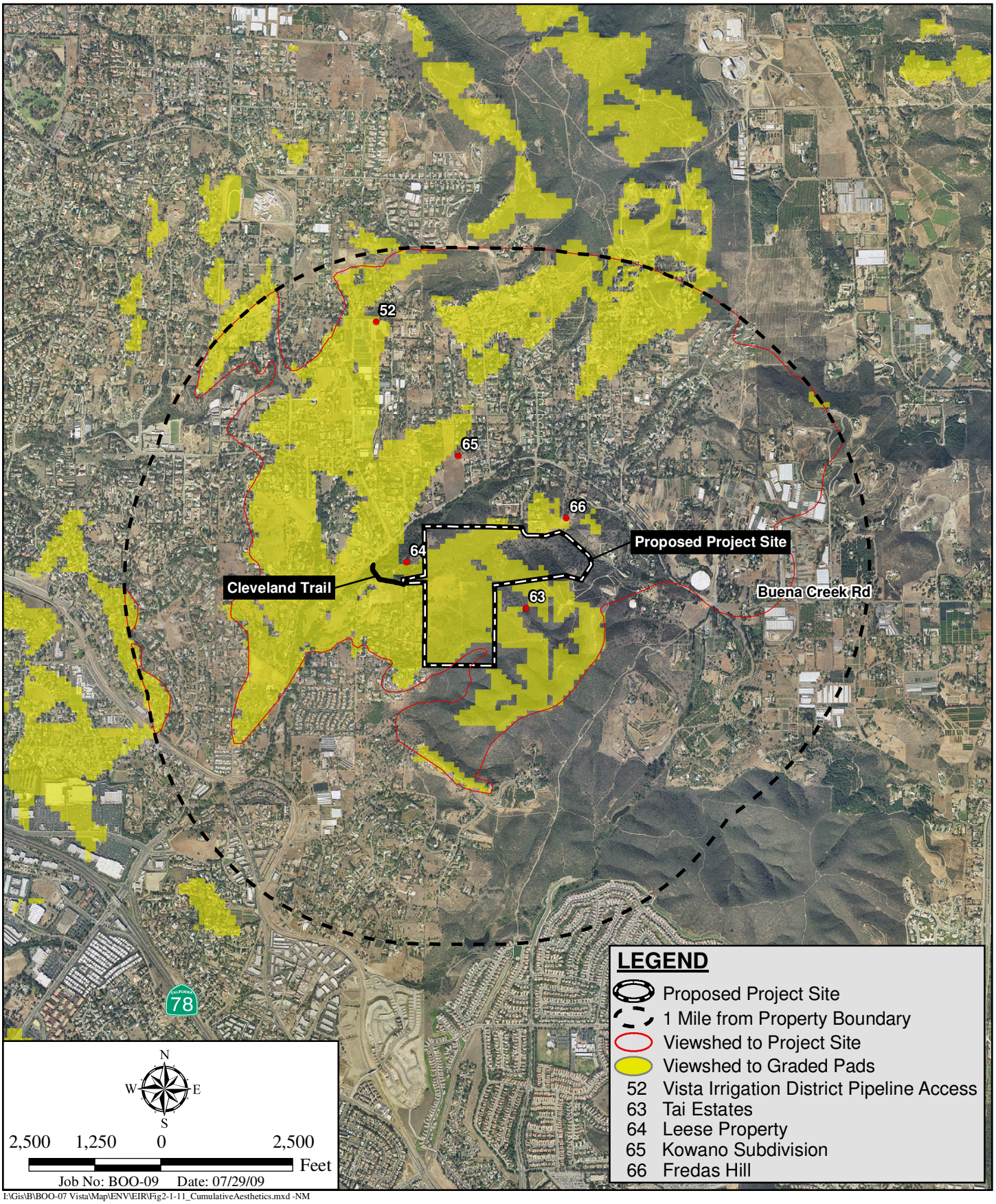
Conceptual Landscape Plan

SUGARBUSH RESIDENTIAL PROJECT

Figure 2.1-10



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Cumulative Projects for Aesthetics

SUGARBUSH RESIDENTIAL PROJECT

Figure 2.1-11